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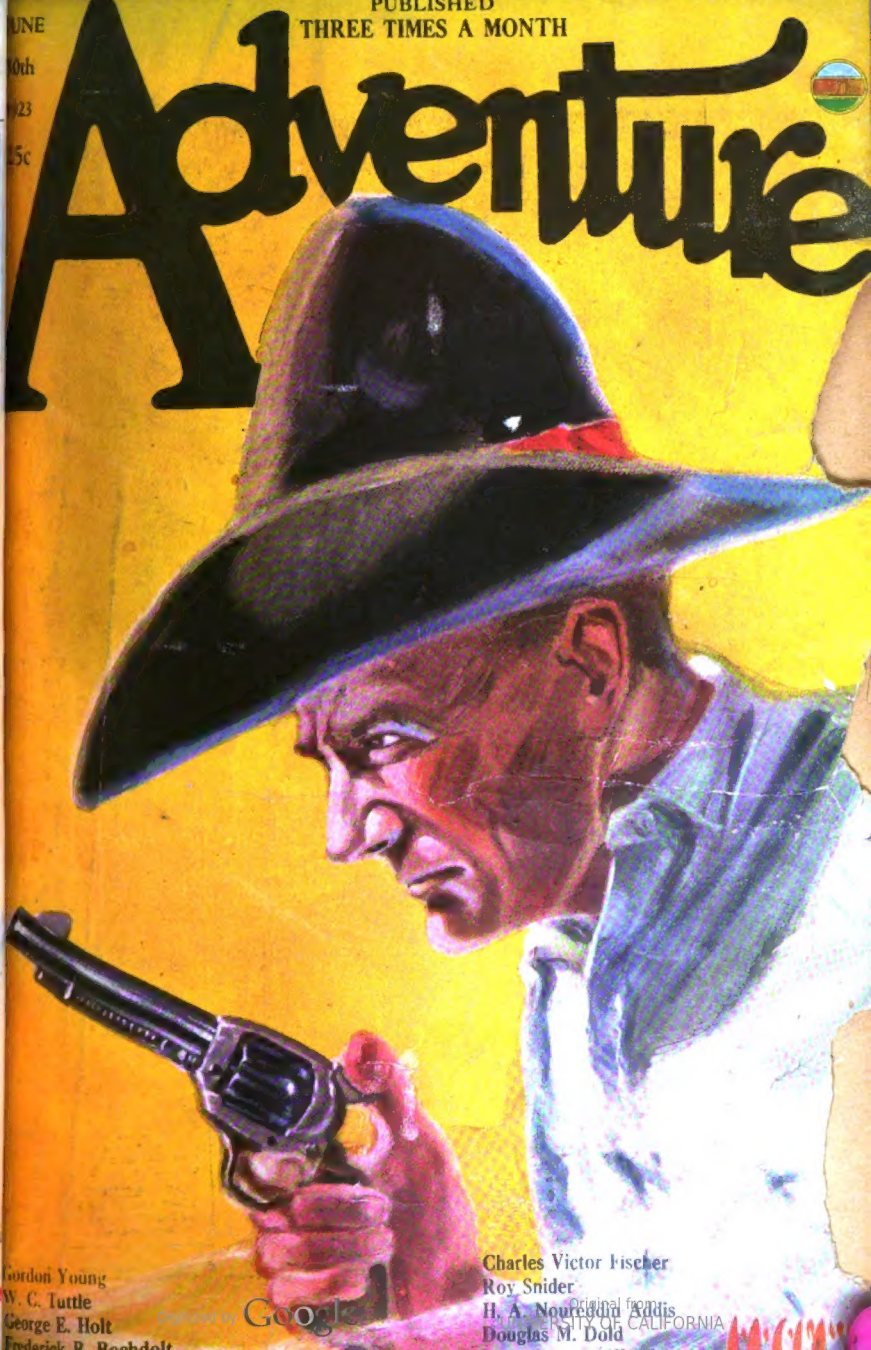

Gordon Young
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These "B.V.D." garments are reinforced at points of possible strain—all seams sewn with lockstitch throughout and cannot unravel.

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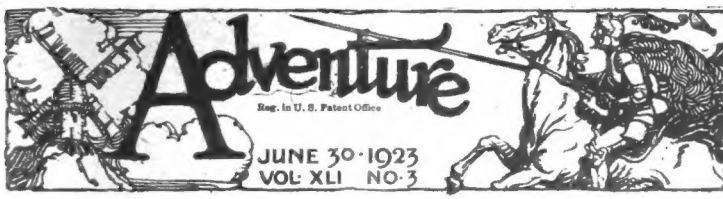

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Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

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One Novel, Two Novelettes, Complete

WHO was *"Nightbird,"* dreaded head of a strange band of cattle-rustlers and murderers? That is what the cowtown of Lebanon, on the Arkansas River, set itself to find out one morning in the early nineties, when the station agent *Myers* was found murdered. The solution was surprizing, to say the least; and there was a lot of excitement leading up to it. "THE ROUND-UP," a novel of the Southwest, by Oscar J. Friend, complete in the next issue.

ACCORDING TO THE MANIFEST, the *He Lung's* cargo was not valuable. Yet, when she was wrecked, two opposing forces—Chinese and white—spared no expense, took great risks, and committed murder, barratry and abduction in order to be first aboard her. "UP THE CHINA SEA," a complete novelette of the Southern Pacific, by H. Bedford-Jones, in the next issue.

"YOU ain't a man yet, not by a long ways," said the steward to *Eric*, who had come from the farm to find adventure on the Great Lakes. There wasn't much of it in the galley of the dirty little schooner, and *Eric* thought the steward might be right—until the storms came. "THE PANTRY WATCH," by Karl W. Detzer, is a complete novelette in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

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Author of "Tramps of the Range," "Sticky Ropes," etc.

"I TELL yuh he did make out a will! You're danged right he did! That day he had Williams, the lawyer, from Broken Butte he made out that will. Aw-w-w, ——, you make me tired!"

"Wheezer" Bell spat angrily and hammered his boot-heel against the wall of the NR bunk-house. Wheezer was half-inclined to be mad at "Leather" Kleig, who was humped up in the shade, his thin, impassive face hidden under the brim of his wide sombrero.

"Chet" Wells, a broken-nosed, scar-faced cowboy, was stretched out, half in shade, half in sun, chewing a big portion of tobacco; while just beyond him sat "Wooden-shoes" Van Dorn, a fat, stolid-faced, pig-eyed cowboy.

"You engineered this deal, Leather—" Wheezer stopped hammering the bunk-house wall and glared down at the top of Leather's hat—"and you sure raised —— and put a block under it, if anybody rises from the dead to inquire."

Leather did not look up, but said slowly—

"Wheezer, you're talkin' too —— much!"

"Well, there ain't no use of talkin'— much," observed Wooden-shoes slowly, "and we don't want to make trouble among us, do we, Wheezer?"

"Aw, I ain't huntin' trouble," Wheezer assured him, "but we ain't got a —— thing t' show that the NR owes us a danged thing."

"True as gospel preachin'," agreed Chet warmly. "If Leather'd only said like this to the old man: You write——"

"Now, you're gettin' the tongue-trouble, too, eh?" interrupted Leather ominously, but did not look up.

Wheezer shoved away from the wall and stepped around in front of Leather Kleig, his thumbs hooked over the top of his cartridge-belt.

"Kleig, if you think for a minute that you can stop me from talkin'—cut yore wolf loose." Wheezer's voice was pitched low, but was full of meaning. "You've bossed this outfit too —— much; *sabe?* We've been gypped out of everythin'. Now, put up or shut up."

Kleig did not move, but his eyes flashed to Wheezer for a second.

"Like I said before," stated Wooden-shoes impassively, "we shouldn't quarrel among us. Whatcha say, Wheezer? Let's all be good little friends together."

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"Thassall right," nodded Leather. "I ain't sayin' that I didn't make a mistake, but yuh gotta agree that I lose as much as you fellers do."

"Sure, sure," agreed Chet indifferently. "I heard the old man tell yuh that he was goin' to sell the NR and split the pot. Yuh can't blame Leather 'cause the old man decides to die off, can yuh, Wheezer?"

"'S far as that's concerned—no," admitted Wheezer. "But it sure leaves us high and dry, Chet."

Wooden-shoes suddenly burst into a dry chuckle.

"Now, what in —— are you laughin' at?" demanded Chet.

"Just laughin'," replied Wooden-shoes. "Here we've been stealin' stock for over a year for old Nick Ralls, and ain't got nothin' for ourselves."

"Except experience," said Wheezer gloomily.

All of which was both sad and true. Many years previous to this time, Nick Ralls, an old gun-man of the Southwest, had migrated to the Broken Butte ranges and taken up the NR ranch. Nick Ralls was a bitter old codger, quick of temper, and very flexible of conscience.

He did not prosper, but made a living. There were few NR cows on the Broken Buttes when Leather Kleig, Wheezer Bell, Wooden-shoes Van Dorn and Chet Wells rode into the yard of the tumble-down ranch-house and informed old Nick that they were both hungry and tired.

The sheriff of the adjoining county lost them in the breaks and went home disgusted; but they did not know this. They needed sanctuary, and old Nick Ralls gave it to them, because he recognized them as kindred spirits.

Old Nick was growing old—raspingly old. The Broken Butte range was a fertile field for those who carried a running-iron and little regard for the law. And when the adjoining county had practically forgotten the four men who attempted to rob the bank at Dry Wells, the four men made an oral contract with old Nick Ralls.

Leather Kleig was a brand counterfeiter. His skill with a running-iron or razor was uncanny. Combination brands were an open book to him. Every animal that fell within their loop or corral was quickly made over into an NR, which would pass muster even on close examination, and old Nick Ralls chuckled evilly, while his herd grew until the hills of Broken Butte range were dotted with his possessions.

Then, as Wheezer described it:

"He ups and dies. And the or'nary old son-of-a-sea-cook knowed he was goin' to die, didn't he? Then why does he send for a lawyer to make out his will?"

All of which was not at all cheerful to the four men in the shade of the NR bunkhouse.

"Yeah, it leaves us high and dry," admitted Chet. "We ain't got nothin' to show for all our hard work. If yuh asks my opinion, I'd suggest that we all line up, give the word and all start shootin'. If there's any survivor, he can take what money the other fellers has got and pull out."

"Good idea!" exploded Wooden-shoe. "I'd like——"

"You would!" interrupted Wheezer sarcastically. "You ain't got a danged cent to lose. Leather must have about six-bits, which is four-bits more than I've got. I dunno about Chet, but I reckon two-bits would about tap him."

"Then that idea ain't so good," said Chet mournfully. "What'll we do? Brand the NR cows all over and sell them to the sheriff?"

"——, the sheriff!" grunted Leather. "He's too pious. Goes to church! —— deliver me from a church-goin' sheriff."

"One thing's a cinch," observed Chet thoughtfully. "If them misbranded critters are ever discovered, they can't hang the deadwood on to us. We don't own 'em. And no sensible man ever steals cows as a pastime."

"I'm through stealin' cows," declared Wooden-shoe, emphatically. "I tell yuh, I'm through."

"Reformin', eh?" sneered Leather Kleig.

"Yeah, I'm goin' to rob banks or trains—and I'm goin' to steal for me; *sabe?*"

"We're a —— of a fine bunch of outlaws," declared Wheezer. "Bad men from Bitter Crick. ——! 'F we don't look out, some old lady is goin' to hoodle us off this range with a parasol."

"For his heart was hard and so was his hide,
And the rattlesnake crawled away and died,
The da-a-a-y he bit Bill Jo-o-o-nes."

Chet's voice quavered lovingly on the last line, and his broken nose twitched feelingly.

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"You can do a lot of things better than yuh can sing," observed Wooden-shoe sadly. "You ought to twist yore ears a little, Chet. Yuh sound like a couple of yore strings was loose."

"Bein' funny ain't gittin' us no place—" Wheezer dug his heel into the hard dirt. "What are we goin' to do? That's the question. If old Ralls didn't leave no will, I s'pose the whole works will be sold by the sheriff."

"I'd love to set on a fence and see that —— sheriff sell my cows!" exploded Leather.

"What 'd yuh do?" asked Wheezer. "Would yuh tell him how it comes that yuh feel bad about it, Leather?"

"Talkin' makes me hungry," stated Wooden-shoe. "Let's go and see what Ma Coogan's got for supper."

"And that's another thing," said Wheezer. "What in —— is goin' to become of Ma Coogan?"

"Yessir, that's another thing," agreed Wooden-shoe.

MA COOGAN was the cook and housekeeper of the NR, and was as much a part of the ranch as the old ranch-house. She was about sixty years of age; thirty of which had been spent in the range country.

Ten years previous to this time, Jim Coogan and his wife had been nesters in the Broken Butte range. Nesters were not wanted, and old Jim had absorbed a bullet; which left Ma Coogan destitute.

Nick Ralls, whose heart was bitter against everything, and nesters in particular, had installed the old widow as cook and housekeeper in the NR. He swore at the time that he did not do it to be kind, but to prove that he could be contrary to his own nature.

Ma Coogan was a little woman, with a typically Irish face, a heart of gold, but with a tongue that proved to Nick Ralls the advisibility of running his end of the ranch and not interfering with the household.

It was five days since the burial of Nick Ralls, and Ma Coogan was beginning to get back to normal. She had never considered what Ralls' death might mean to her. She was sitting on the porch, as the four men came up to the ranch-house, fanning herself with a magazine.

"Ye're all hungry, I suppose," she remarked. "And what have ye done to make ye hungry, I'd ask? Are ye goin' to sit in the shade all the rest of your life?"

"Looks kinda like it, Ma," said Wheezer. "But what's the use of workin'? There's nobody to pay salaries."

"Nobody?" Ma Coogan stopped fanning herself. "Nobody to pay—well, bless me soul!"

She stared at them and her eyes shifted to the hazy hills, as a sudden realization of things came to her.

"I never thought of that," she said softly. "Nobody to pay salaries, nobody to run the ranch. Now, what's to become of everybody, I'd like to know?"

Wheezer shook his head.

"I dunno, Ma. Do you remember that lawyer comin' up here a couple of days before Nick Ralls died?"

"That fat, fish-eyed feller from Broken Butte? Aye, he was with Nick Ralls for a long time."

"He's a lawyer, Ma. We was wonderin' if Nick made out a will. He knowed he was goin' to die, I reckon."

"He did that," declared Ma. "Belike he heard the banshee wailin'; I dunno."

"What's a banshee, Ma?" asked Wooden-shoe.

"Sure, it's an Irish ghost. When ye hear one wailin', ye'r goin' to die, Wooden-shoe. There's a lot of thim that has heard the banshee."

Leather Kleig laughed sarcastically.

"Ghosts! No ghost would wail over Nick Ralls. What I'd like to know: Did Nick Ralls make out a will?"

"There was such a thing mentioned," said Ma slowly. "I heard thim speak of a will, and there was a paper that I had to sign me name to, but I did not read it.

"This fish-eyed feller he puts his finger on one spot, and he says for me to write me name there. Ould Nick says that I'm a witness. I dunno what it was all about, but it looked like some sort of a cer-ti-fic-it."

"That was a will," declared Wheezer. "Did he ever tell yuh about any of his relatives, Ma?"

"He did not, Wheezer. I misdoubt if he had any. But Nick Ralls was no man to blather about any one. Hated the world, so he did. He even swore at the lawyer. Well, the poor soul has gone to glory, and if I don't go in and finish gittin' supper, the rest of ye will be failin' for want of food."

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"If Nick Ralls has gone to glory, I hope I don't," declared Leather Kleig. "He wasn't entitled to it."

"Aw, sure, now—" Ma Coogan turned at the doorway and looked down at Leather, "ye mustn't wish ill of a dead man. He wasn't all bad, Leather. Do ye think that God is goin' to punish ye by sendin' ye to a hot place? What would He gain by it, I'd ask ye? Would it be a lesson to thim that stayed behind in this life?

"We wouldn't see it. A lovin' God wouldn't git no satisfaction out of it, would he? Thin where is your reasons for a place of damnation, I dunno? I tell ye, I think that Nick Ralls went to glory."

"All right, Ma," said Leather gloomily. "I hope, if he has, that he can look down and see what a —— fool he was to leave the NR in this kinda shape."

"Amen," said Ma Coogan piously.

IT WAS three days later that Eph Williams, the lawyer from Broken Butte, came again to the NR; and with him came Ben Murtch, the sheriff, and a lady.

The four cowboys looked with great disfavor upon Ben Murtch and Eph Williams, because they had little use for the law in any of its forms. But there was a certain amount of speculation regarding the lady.

Murtch was a bandy-legged person, broad-shouldered, and with a massive head. His features were of the type commonly known as bulldog, and he was reputed fast with a gun. On account of their wild doings in Broken Butte, Murtch had no use for the boys of the NR—and did not conceal his feelings.

Both Murtch and Williams attended the little church at Broken Butte, and at times Williams would pass the collection plate. The four cowboys from the NR went to church one Sunday night, more out of curiosity than from piety, and observed the actions of Williams and Murtch.

Hence Leather Kleig's remark of—

"Lord deliver me from a church-goin' sheriff."

Williams, Murtch and the lady came out to the ranch in a top-buggy, and went straight to the ranch-house. The four cowboys sat at the bunk-house and speculated as to who the lady might be, until Murtch left the house and came down to see them.

"Howdy, boys," he greeted them pleasantly, but they were not receptive to his greeting.

He stopped near them and hitched up his belt.

"Thought yuh might like to know who the lady is," he remarked.

"Yeah?" Wheezer squinted sideways at him. "Yuh thought so, did yuh?"

"Yeah, I though yuh would."

"Reckon we ought to take a vote on it?" questioned Chet.

"That," said Murtch, not a bit perturbed over their indifference, "that is Miss Jane Cleveland, who owns this ranch, lock, stock and barrel."

"Oh, yeah!" Wheezer nodded quickly. "That's who she is, eh?"

"Yeah, that's her."

"Who's she?" Wooden-shoe hugged his knees and grinned at Murtch.

"That's a —— of a question," declared Murtch.

"It's a good question, and there ought to be an answer layin' around somewhere."

Eph Williams was coming down from the house, and Murtch decided to wait and let him explain things.

"Fish-eye," chuckled Wheezer. "Shore fits him."

The rest of the cowboys grinned, and Eph looked uncomfortable, even if he did not know what had been said.

"Did you tell 'em, Murtch?" asked Williams. His voice was rather husky, as if suffering from a heavy cold.

"I left the job to you," said Murtch. "You *sabe* it better than I do."

"I sure as —— hope he does," growled Leather.

"Well, it is simple," smiled Williams. "Miss Cleveland just arrived from Helena to take charge of this ranch. Just before Nick Ralls passed on he had me make out his will. Miss Cleveland is the daughter of his only sister, and the only living relative of Nick Ralls. He had kept track of her all these years, and when he felt that his days were numbered, he sent for me, made out his will, and—" Williams spread his hands—"that is all there is to it."

"Well, now, that's quite a lot," admitted Leather, and the other three cowboys knew what he meant.

"Miss Cleveland knows nothing about cattle," stated Williams, "but she was more than willing to take charge. I do not know whether she will retain any or all of you

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boys. I have made no suggestions. As far as I can see there is no use of having four cowboys to handle the cattle, but I am leaving it to her to do things to suit herself."

"That's —— kind of yuh, I'm sure," applauded Chet. "What did you say your business was?"

"I am an attorney-at-law," said Williams stiffly.

"Oh, yeah—a lawyer?"

"Don't waste words on 'em, Eph," advised Murtch. "They're tryin' to get under your hide."

"Wouldn't be under it for the world," denied Chet. "I'd smother t' death in a minute."

Williams whirled on his heel and went back toward the horse and buggy, walking stiff-legged, like an angry bear. Murtch looked after him and turned to the grinning cowboys.

"You fellers likely don't know that Williams will have quite a lot to say about this place, do yuh? He's goin' to advise Miss Cleveland on business matters."

"Lord help her," said Wheezer sadly.

Murtch scowled and turned away, starting back to where Williams was getting into the buggy.

"You didn't tell us what your business is," reminded Wooden-shoe.

Murtch grunted something unintelligible, but did not turn his head.

They drove down past the bunk-house, on their way out of the ranch, but neither of them looked at the four grinning cowboys on the steps.

"A heiress," said Wheezer dolefully. "A blasted heiress to our cows!"

"And a fish-eyed lawyer advisin' her what to do with them," added Chet. "If somebody'd stick a fork into us they'd find us well done."

Chet got to his feet and executed a double-shuffle on the steps, while he sang sadly:

"Oh, Williams, yo're a ——
Oh, Williams, yo're a bum;
There's nothin' good about you,
And yore breath sure smells of rum.
Yo're killin' us by inches,
I know I am yore slave
But when you die, you son-of-a-gun,
I'll dance upon yore grave."

"That record sounds scratched," observed Wheezer dryly. "Sounds like a Injun with hay-fever, tryin' to give a imitation of C'ruso singin' soprano."

"Aw, ——!" Leather Kleig snorted his disgust and got to his feet. "Let's go and meet the new boss."

"Mebbe she'll appreciate my voice," said Chet hopefully. "I'll take a chance."

"I'll shoot yuh, if yuh try singin' to her," threatened Wheezer, as they trooped to the ranch-house.

"Aw, he won't make no never mind," assured Wooden-shoe. "I hope he yodels and busts his windpipe."

"What's a yodel?" asked Wheezer.

Wooden-shoe stopped, pointed his nose toward the sky and began:

"*Hi-i-i lee-e-e-e o la lay-ee-e-e*— Leggo! Ouch!"

Wheezer and Chet had moved in swiftly beside him, each grabbing him by collar and boot and dumped him unceremoniously on top of his head. Then they let go at the same time and his heels hit the ground with a thud.

For a moment, Wooden-shoe's breath was jarred from his body, and he lay there goggling at the sky.

"I hope he isn't injured."

The cowboys turned and stared at Jane Cleveland, who was standing on the porch, staring at Wooden-shoe, who sat up and puffed the atmosphere back into his lungs. He saw her and tried to laugh.

"No, ma'am," said Wheezer foolishly. "You can't hurt him."

Wheezer had removed his hat, and now he stepped over, lifted Wooden-shoe's hat off his head and placed it in his lap.

Jane Cleveland was a stately brunette, well-dressed, possibly twenty-five years of age. There was no question of her beauty, but it was marred a trifle by the superiority of her manner. She might well have been a queen, looking down upon them; making them feel rather out of place before her. Her lips lifted slightly in a semblance of a smile at Wheezer's rough wit.

"You are the cowboys, I suppose?"

"Yes'm, I s'pose we are," nodded Chet.

He looked at the other three and back at the girl.

"Yes'm, I'm sure of it now. Get up, Wooden-shoe. My gosh, you ain't got no manners a-tall."

"You're Miss Cleveland, I s'pose," observed Leather.

It was a perfect imitation of her question, and her eyes hardened slightly.

"Yes, I am Miss Cleveland, the owner of this farm."

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"My ——!" breathed Chet. "Farm!"

Ma Coogan had come out of the door, and Miss Cleveland turned.

"Was there something you wanted?"

"Nothin', me dear," said Ma Coogan.

"Then I think your place is in the kitchen —not on the veranda."

Ma Coogan looked wonderingly at Miss Cleveland.

"Would ye mind sayin' that again?"

"Are you not the cook?"

Miss Cleveland's voice was icy.

"Yes, I'm the cook."

"There is nothing to cook out here."

"Well—" Ma Coogan swallowed painfully and looked appealingly at the four cowboys—"well, I s'pose that's right. I never thought of that—in ten years."

She turned and went back into the house. Leather Kleig cleared his throat, and his eyes narrowed dangerously, but Wheezer trod heavily on the side of his ankle and saved Leather from saying the wrong thing.

"I have not made up my mind what I am going to do with this place." Miss Cleveland was talking, but the four boys were still staring at the doorway where Ma Coogan had disappeared and paid no attention to her.

"I would like to know just what I inherited from my uncle. Can you give me an estimate of how many cows, horses, etc., are included in this ranch?"

"Well—" Wheezer scratched his head thoughtfully—"that's kinda hard, ma'am. There won't be no round-up for a month, and 'till we kinda bunches them cows there ain't no way of tellin'."

"Didja know yore uncle very well?" asked Wooden-shoe.

"No, I never have seen him."

"He didn't have much sense, ma'am."

"Is that so?" Miss Cleveland seemed indifferent to that statement.

"You goin' to run the ranch yoreself, ma'am?" asked Leather.

"I suppose I will. Mr. Williams, the lawyer, will advise me in some of the details, and Mr. Murtch has offered his services at any time. Is there any reason why I cannot handle it?"

"Not with all that help—" Leather shook his head. "Of course you've got to hire some cowboys."

"Naturally. Mr. Williams said that I could probably get along with less hired help than my uncle did. In fact, they informed me that every one wondered how uncle managed to make the ranch pay, with four cowboys in his employ."

"Yeah, it is a wonder," agreed Leather softly. "Yuh see, he hired us by the year and died two days before payday. This ranch owes us each four hundred and eighty dollars apiece."

"Four hundred and eighty dollars apiece?"

"Yes'm," said Wheezer grinning widely and making some rapid calculations. "The old NR owes us four punchers the grand total of nineteen hundred and twenty dollars."

Wooden-shoe blinked and wet his lips with his tongue. He was a willing but slow liar, and he marveled at Leather telling a thing like that.

"And we sure worked faithful-like," added Chet sadly. "A year's a long time to go without a payday. 'Course the ranch is good for it, ma'am; so we ain't worryin'."

"Well," said Miss Cleveland dubiously, "I know nothing about such things, but I shall take it up with Mr. Williams."

"And Ma Coogan kinda got the worst of it," said Wheezer mournfully. "Yuh see, when she goes to work for yore uncle, he says to her—

" 'If you work for me for ten years without pay, I'll give yuh enough to keep yuh for the rest of yore life.'

"Well, she's sure worked faithfully, y'betcha. It ain't no cinch runnin' her end of the job. Now, she's old and can't land no other job, but I reckon you'll see that she gets what old Nick Ralls promised her."

"But I know nothing about these things," protested Miss Cleveland, "Is there any agreement—a written agreement, I mean?"

"Shucks, folks use their word instead of ink out here," said Leather. "We've all heard Nick tell what he was goin' to do for Ma Coogan. Why, jist the other day he says to me, like this—

" 'Leather, if anythin' happens to me, will you see that Ma Coogan gits what's comin' to her?'

"I told him that I sure would, ma'am."

"Why wasn't she mentioned in the will?"

"I'll tell yuh why, ma'am." Chet moved in closer and lowered his voice. "Old Nick Ralls wasn't in his right mind. He heard the banshee wailin'."

"The—what do you mean?" Miss Cleveland frowned slightly. "What did he hear?"

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"A banshee wailin'. There's lot of 'em, ma'am. When yuh hear one, yuh might as well practise up on some kind of a harp, 'cause yuh ain't got no chance left."

"I do not think I understand—nor care. By the way, I do not know your names."

"I'm Wheezer Bell," Wheezer indicated himself. "That's Leather Kleig. Got his front name from reachin' for a saddle-horn so often. This'n," pointing at Chet, "this'n is Chet Wells. He's old man Wells' son. That other one is Wooden-shoe Van Dorn, the only Dutch cowpuncher in captivity. He can squeak like a windmill, and he wakes up yelling at night, thinkin' that the dykes have busted."

"Thank you very much."

She turned and went into the house.

THE four cowboys looked at each other and went back to the bunk-house, where they draped themselves in the shade and stared at each other.

"Leather," said Wheezer softly, "yo're the first—— liar I ever loved. But can we work that idea?"

"Who in —— can say that we lied?" queried Chet. "Nick Ralls never kept no books."

"I dunno—" Leather shook his head sadly—"I'm a son-of-a-gun if I ever seen a look on anybody's face like there was on Ma's, when Miss Cleveland ordered her back to the kitchen."

"Aw, that was too bad," nodded Wheezer, "And Ma took it, too."

"Yeah, and we better kinda look a little out," said Wooden-shoe. "She'd fire the whole bunch of us. There wasn't no use lyin' about Ma Coogan. Us liars can stick together, but Ma wouldn't back us up."

"She's goin' to be advised by Williams and helped by Murtch," mused Leather aloud; "I dunno——"

He shook his head sadly and began manufacturing a cigaret.

"—— old Nick Ralls!" exploded Chet.

"He sure had a cause to keep away from his relation," said Wheezer. "That woman ain't got no heart, don'tcha know it?"

"Pretty ones hardly ever do have," said Leather.

"You've knowed so many of them," grinned Chet.

"I betcha she won't eat at the table with us," offered Wooden-shoe. "I betcha she makes Ma set a table in the front room for her."

"I sure hope she does," declared Chet. "If she don't—we will. By golly, she's pretty, though."

"Yore rope's draggin'," cautioned Wheezer.

"Well, suppose it is, I didn't say I was stuck on her, did I?"

"I suppose Wooden-shoe will be makin' love to her pretty quick," said Leather.

"No sir," Wooden-shoe shook his head vehemently and his face flushed hotly. "I stole cows for a year for her, and that's enough. She can't expect too much."

Ma Coogan's hammering of the steel triangle, which hung at the kitchen-door, broke up the meeting, and the four cowboys trooped to the rear of the kitchen to wash up for supper.

There was no sign of the new owner, and Ma Coogan was strangely silent. Even the cowboys ate silently, which was unusual.

"My ——!" grunted Wheezer. "You'd think somebody done died around here."

"Somethin' has, I reckon," whispered Chet seriously, and Ma Coogan shook her head warningly at him.

At the conclusion of the meal, which none of them enjoyed, Leather Kleig drew Ma Coogan out of the back door, while the others grouped close around them.

"Ma," said Leather, "did you know that Nick Ralls told you that, if yuh stayed here ten years, he'd fix yuh up so yuh wouldn't have to work no more?"

She squinted at Leather and around at the other cowboys wonderingly.

"You know he said that, don'tcha, Ma?" asked Chet.

"Well, bless my soul! Where did ye ever get that strange idea?"

"That's what he told me."

Leather Kleig was serious enough to have been telling the truth.

"Nick Ralls told ye that, Leather?"

"Honest Injun, Ma."

"Well, I dunno—" Ma looked vacantly around. "That's news, so it is. I've niver heard—sure, you're jokin', now."

"Ma, look here." Wheezer put his hand on her shoulder. "You've been here ten years, workin' hard. Did yuh ever think what Nick Ralls' death would mean to you? This here lady boss ain't noways human. She'd fire her own father. If she lets yuh out—what'll become of yuh, Ma?"

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Ma Coogan gasped slightly and shook her head.

"Sure, I—I dunno, boys. Why, the old ranch has been a home and I niver thought of bein' fired. I—I'd hate to leave—here. But," she lifted her head and smiled around at them, "sure, there's no use of borryin' a lot of trouble. The things ye worry the most about never happen."

"Jist the same it's wise to have your gun loaded," observed Wheezer. "We was jist wonderin' if yuh knowed what Nick Ralls intended to give yuh. We supposed that you knowed all about it, 'cause he told us."

Ma Coogan looked straight into Wheezer's eyes, and he turned away under her steady gaze.

"Ye'r' a lovable liar, Wheezer," she said softly, "but ye can't fool old Ma Coogan. Sure, it's nice of ye all, but ye know well that Nick Ralls niver had any such foolish ideas."

Wheezer shuffled his feet nervously and shoved his hands deep into his pockets.

"Ma, we're tryin' to get a square-deal, thassall. If that fish-eyed lawyer asks yuh about it, would yuh mind just askin' him if it ain't in the will?"

"In the will?"

"Yeah. You don't have to tell no lie, Ma. If he starts jawin' around, which he will, just ask him that, will yuh?"

"Sure, I dunno what good it'll do, but I'll ask him."

"Where's the beautiful princess?" asked Wooden-shoe.

"Eatin' in her own room. She'll have her breakfast in bed, so she says—at tin o'clock. She asked me if you boys were fair samples of cowboys, and I told her that the NR niver hired samples.

"Thin," Ma Coogan lowered her voice, "she asked me what a cattle-rustler was, and I told her it was a cowpuncher out of work. She said she'd have more respect, or there'd be four cattle-rustlers lookin' for new positions. Sure, that's what she said—'positions'."

Leather grinned and shook his head—

"She's goin' to be advised by the fish-eyed lawyer, Ma."

"Thin, may God help the old ranch!" Ma exclaimed piously.

"It'll sure need somethin' from the outside," said Wheezer sadly. "Don't forget what you've got to say to him, Ma. It won't be lyin'."

Ma nodded and went back into the kitchen, while the four cowboys went back to the bunk-house.

"Suppose we can't make that stick with the lawyer; what'll we do?" asked Wooden-shoe.

"Do?" Leather Kleig flung one of his boots across the rough floor and wiggled his toes through a hole in his sock. "What'll we do? By ——, we stole most of them NR cows for Nick Ralls, didn't we? Then what in —— is goin' to stop us from stealin' 'em from the NR?"

"Not me," Wooden-shoe shook his head quickly. "I'm a re-formed cattle-rustler, by gosh! From now on, I don't rob nothin' but stages and banks."

"You goin' to Broken Butte tomorrow, Leather?" asked Wheezer.

"What for? We ain't even got enough money to play a game of seven-up."

"Mebbyso we will have. Clay Hardy offered me fifty for that glass-eyed sorrel a week ago, but I wanted a hundred. Mebbe he'll be wantin' sixty dollars worth tomorrow, and if he does—that's fifteen apiece."

"I *sabe* a roulette system," declared Wooden-shoe. "It's a cinch. All yuh do——"

"Make it twenty apiece for three of us," interrupted Leather. "That's a better system than Wooden-shoe's."

THE town of Broken Butte was a county seat, but, outside of that fact it had little to boast about. Perhaps there were a few more false-fronted buildings than in the average Western cow-town; perhaps it was a little hotter in Summer and colder in Winter; but it was still a weather-beaten, hitch-rack decorated, dusty-streeted cow-town.

There was the usual array of restaurants, where the inner man might be well appeased for two-bits. The fact that there were two livery-stables rather lifted Broken Butte out of the mediocre class, but its chief claim to distinction was the Shoshone Saloon, where wine, women and song brought surcease from range-land sorrows, and kept the cowboys broke but contented.

"Battler" Morgan owned the Shoshone, a pugnacious jaw, one cauliflower ear and a memory of the days when men fought with bare knuckles. He could throw a bottle almost as straight as a cowboy could shoot a gun—but not quite.

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He had found this out to his sorrow, when he essayed to bounce a bottle off the head of Wheezer Bell. Wheezer had incurred Battler's displeasure by slamming a bullet into the bottle, in mid-air. The bottle was coming toward Wheezer, but the .45 bullet caused it to sort of evaporate, and the neck of the bottle boomeranged into Battler's front teeth.

Wheezer admitted that he shot at the bottle, which the rest of the NR gang knew to be a mistake, but it established Wheezer as a bad man to monkey with. Battler bought some "store" teeth and quit throwing bottles at gunmen.

Eph Williams owned an office on the main street, and he was climbing into a top-buggy when the four cowboys rode in from the NR ranch. Williams sighed with relief as he drove out of town.

He had no wish to meet these four men. He knew, to his sorrow, that they did not respect him in the least, and he secretly wished that they might be hailed into court, charged with a serious offense.

For Eph Williams, in spite of the fact that he passed the collection plate at church, did not "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." These four men laughed at him, and he did not like that. He had often wondered why Nick Ralls hired these four men. One day he had asked Nick Ralls regarding them, and Nick Ralls had told him that it was none of his adjectived business.

The four cowboys watched Eph Williams drive out of town, and Chet wailed over the fact that they would not be at the ranch to greet him.

"We'd take off his wheels and make him walk home."

"Yeah, and have him advise Cleopatra to fire us," said Wheezer. "You ain't got a —— bit of fi-ness."

"That's a nice word to call a friend," said Chet accusingly. "You go and sell that wall-eyed cayuse to 'Clay' Hardy, professor."

"Yeah, you do that," agreed Leather. "But if yuh see that bat-headed Murtch, don't antagonize him. He's in cahoots with Williams."

"Rope's draggin'!" Wheezer whispered warningly.

Leather turned quickly and saw Murtch standing within five feet of him. He had come out of the Shoshone Saloon while they were talking. There was not the slightest doubt but what Murtch had heard what Leather Kleig had said, but his face told them nothing.

"All right, I'll go and find Clay," said Wheezer. Then to Murtch—

"Is Clay at the office?"

Clay Hardy was Murtch's deputy; a vile-tempered, pasty-faced individual, who was reputed to be the best rifle-shot in the country, in spite of the fact that he was of the jerky, nervous type.

"I reckon he's there," replied Murtch softly, and walked past them, going across the street.

Wheezer led the sorrel down the street toward the sheriff's office, while the other three cowboys went into the Shoshone, to wait for Wheezer to bring them funds enough for a little riotous living.

There was little warmth in Battler Morgan's reception, but he did invite them to have a drink.

"What'sa matter with it?" asked Chet wonderingly.

"With what?" asked Battler.

"Yore liquor," explained Chet. "You givin' it away, kinda makes me wonder. How's tricks, Battler?"

"All right," growled Battler. He was not very quick witted. "Whatcha drinkin'?"

"I'll smoke a see-gar," stated Woodenshoe. "Gift whisky hurts my stummick. Got any of them two-bit Flor de Loco Weeds? Yuh know what I mean—them dusty ones."

"Never look a gift see-gar in the dust," advised Leather, leaning across the bar and studying the labels on some dusty-looking case-goods.

"Well, name your drinks," said Battler impatiently.

"W-h-i-t-e S-e-a-l," spelled Leather. "What's that—sody-water, Battler?"

"Champagne," gruffly.

"I'll take a chance on her," nodded Leather.

"Yuh will? At ten dollars per bottle?"

"Well, ain't we yore friends?" asked Chet. "Ten per bottle ain't nothin' between friends, 'specially when we've got a lady boss. Didja hear about it, Battler?"

Battler nodded.

"Murtch was tellin' me. What you jaspers goin' to do for a job?"

"Work for the NR," replied Leather dryly, motioning for the bartender to open a bottle of champagne.

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"Want me to open a bottle, Battler?"

The bartender wanted official sanction.

"No!" snapped Battler. "I ain't wastin' champagne on cowpunchers. Whisky's good enough."

"Not for me, it ain't," declared Leather, turning his back on the bar. "Battler won't treat us right, 'cause he thinks we ain't got nothin' to spend in his danged place."

"You fellers ain't had no pay-day."

Battler was so old in the liquor business that he did not mind admitting a lack of enthusiasm in treating men who were broke.

"Did yuh ever know us to have a pay-day?" asked Chet.

Battler thought it over and shook his head.

"No, I don't think I have. You fellers has spent money, but I never heard yuh mention pay-day."

"You remember that, will yuh?" asked Leather, but before Battler could ask a reason for remembering such a trifling thing, Wheezer came bustling in, kicking his spurred heels on the floor.

"Hookum cow!" he chortled, executing a very poor jig-step. "Nailed Clay for seventy dollars."

He pulled the money out of his chaps pocket and piled it on the bar.

"Are you a sport?" queried Leather.

"Dang right!" exploded Wheezer. "Gimme action."

Leather poked a ten-dollar gold piece out of the pile and shoved it across the bar.

"Give me that bottle of champagne."

The bartender handed it across to him, while Wheezer leaned in close and peered at the dusty, long-necked bottle.

"Whazzat?" he asked curiously.

"This?" Leather patted the bottle. "This is the drink of kings, Wheezer."

He took out his knife and inserted the blade under the wired-top.

Wheezer glanced at the cash register and blinked at Leather.

"Ten dollars for a little bottle? My ——, what's in it?"

Pwhop!

The cork hit Wheezer in the mouth, and most of the champagne struck him in the chest. Leather tried to hold his hand over the neck of the bottle, with the result that a stream of the liquor shot square into Wooden-shoe's face. A shift of the hand shot the stream up into Leather's face and he dropped the bottle on the floor.

Wheezer wiped his sleeve across his face and looked down at the bottle. He scooped up the rest of the money and stuffed it into his pocket.

"Yo're all through playin' king with my money," he announced.

"You don't open champagne like that," explained the bartender chokingly. "You put a towel over——"

"Aw-w-w, ——!" snapped Leather. "I've opened lots of it."

"Yeah, there was quite a lot in that bottle," admitted Chet, feeling of his sticky shirt collar. "Kind of a magic bottle, ain't they?"

"I'll open a bottle," announced Battler joyfully. "I'll show yuh how it's done."

"After we're gone, Battler—not now—" Wheezer was very emphatic—"I've swallered a cork and I smell like I'd had a bath in hard cider. If yuh want to treat, I'll take a see-gar."

The other three nodded dismally and accepted an ancient cigar on the house, which they discarded after a puff or two in favor of a Durham cigaret. Wheezer relented and split his money among them, after which they wooed the goddess of chance in their own ways.

IT WAS about three hours later that Eph Williams drove back to Broken Butte. It was only five miles to the NR ranch, which was far enough to give him a chance to cool his anger against the four cowboys.

He took his horse and buggy to the livery-stable and went back to his little office. Murtch had seen him, and wended his way to Williams' office, where he found Williams in a vile mood. Murtch sat down and waited for Williams to cool down. These two understood each other very well.

"What's the matter?" queried Murtch. "You act all het up, Eph."

"Aw, ——!" exploded Eph, kicking a perfectly good law book off the corner of his desk, that he might have a resting-place for his feet.

"I just came in from the NR, and I find out that them four punchers are claiming that Ralls agreed to pay them once a year, and that the NR owes them four hundred and eighty dollars apiece."

"That's a —— of a thing to claim!" exclaimed Murtch indignantly. "Why, they can't——"

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"That ain't all, Murtch. Miss Cleveland told me that Nick Ralls had promised old lady Coogan that he was going to settle enough money on her, after she had been there ten years, to keep her the rest of her life. And she's been there just ten years."

"Of all the —— fool things I ever heard!"

"Nick Ralls never kept any books. There ain't a scratch of a pen to show how he run his ranch."

"But they can't git away with anythin' like that," protested Murtch. "There ain't nobody runs a ranch that way, Eph."

"Them four claim a total of nineteen hundred and twenty dollars," said Eph thoughtfully. "That's a —— of a lot of money, Murtch."

"Ain't she goin' to fire 'em, Eph?"

"I suppose."

Eph got to his feet and walked over to the door. Wheezer and Chet were coming across the street and their legs seemed a trifle unsecure. Eph opened the door and scowled at them.

"H'lo," greeted Wheezer owlishly. "We're after some legal advice."

"Legal advice, eh?"

Williams squinted at them closely, but, in spite of the fact that they had been drinking, they seemed deadly serious.

Murtch came to the door and looked at the cowboys, who grinned widely at him.

"H'lo, sheriff!"

Wheezer cuffed his hat on to one side of his head and grinned wickedly.

"Whazza matter? You in trouble, too?"

"Not that anybody knows about," retorted Murtch.

"Oh—" Wheezer's lips formed a perfect O and he nodded wisely. "Not that anybody knows about, eh? Well, I s'pose it ain't right to expose yoreself, but me and Chet are open and above-board in everythin', ain't we, Chettie?"

"Oh, very much so," nodded Chet. "We don't have no mustache to deceive the eye."

Murtch grunted angrily and hooked his thumb over his belt above his holster. But this action did not frighten the two cowboys.

"He's half-way home after his gun," observed Chet wisely.

"Just what did you want to know?" asked Williams.

He knew that this talk was only leading up to trouble, and he wanted to avoid it if possible.

"Li'l point of law," explained Wheezer. "Me 'n Chet has had a argument about lawyers, don'tcha see?"

"What was the argument?"

"Well—" Wheezer cuffed his hat sideways again and grew very solemn— "well, this was the argument: I said that lawyers was predatory animals, but Chet argues that there must be a open and a closed season on 'em. Me 'n Chet don't want to break no game laws."

Williams's lips tightened and his face flushed. He was fighting mad, but his better judgment told him to move carefully. Murtch swore under his breath and looked away, but Williams said nothing, as he turned slowly and went back into the office.

"There ain't no answer," said Chet softly.

"Betcha he's gone to look in a book. Lawyers always have to look into books, Chettie."

"My advice to you fellers would be—" began Murtch angrily, but Wheezer interrupted with—

"Nobody asked you for advice, Murtch."

"And nobody, if they've got any brains, ever will," added Chet.

"Is that so? Lemme tell you fellers somethin'. Broken Butte is tired of you four jaspers from the NR, and if you want to get away with a whole hide, yuh better move fast."

"My ——, you frighten me!" squeaked Wheezer. "My tonsils are weak and any sudden shock makes me choke all up."

"Aw, that's too bad," wailed Chet sadly. "Broken Butte is all through with us, Wheezer, don'tcha know it. Just like the song:

> "Out in thish wide wor-r-rld alo-o-one,
> Nothin' but sorrow I see-e-e-e;
> I'm-m-m nobody's dar-r-rling,
> Nobody car-r-r-res for me-e-e-e."

Chet's unmusical voice clung lovingly to the last notes and his eyes closed with ecstasy. Murtch snorted his indignation and walked swiftly away toward his office, both hands clenched around his cartridge-belt, while Wheezer sat down on the wooden sidewalk and shook with unholy mirth.

"What's so —— funny about it?" demanded Chet. "That's a sad song, ain't it? Somebody has to tell yuh when to cry. My, my! Yo're ignorant, cowboy."

Leather came out of the Shoshone and crossed the street to them. He was perfectly sober and his thin lips were tightly drawn, as if suppressing a grin.

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"I tapped the old roulette for a hundred and fifty," he informed them. "And Wooden-shoe has corraled most of the chips in the stud-poker game. C'mon."

"Where yuh goin'?" demanded Wheezer.

"Clerk and Recorder's office. I'm goin' to take a look at old Nick Ralls' will."

"Why spoil a perfec' day? We jist insulted Williams and Murtch."

"We hope we did," amended Chet, "but I doubt it."

"All right," nodded Leather. "Go ahead and get us all fired."

The clerk's office was located at the north end of the town. Broken Butte had never been financially able to build a court house; so the county offices were badly scattered.

The clerk showed them the recorded will, and even volunteered to read it to them. It was short and to the point.

"Bein' in good health and sound of mind, eh?" grinned Leather, as the clerk finished reading. "That danged old gopher never was sound of mind. Leaves all his earthly possessions to Miss Jane Cleveland, his niece, who is his only known living relative."

"I understand that she has taken possession," remarked the clerk.

"Yo're danged right she has," grinned Wheezer. "Man, she's sure took right hold of the old ranch."

They left the clerk's office and started down the street. The stage was just driving up to the front of the general merchandise store, in which the post-office was located, and the three cowboys stopped to watch a newcomer disgorge himself from the interior of the dusty stage.

He was of medium height, slender of build and well dressed. His olive-tinted face was handsome, in spite of its lines of dissipation, and his tiny black mustache was waxed to needle-like points.

He dusted himself off with his hands, paid the driver his fare and watched him unpack two valises off the boot of the stage. He looked at the three cowboys and a flash of recognition crossed his face, but he turned back to the driver, picked up his valises and went down the side-walk toward the Broken Butte hotel.

"You know that dude *hombre*, Leather?" asked Wheezer.

"Yeah. That's the crookedest gambler unhung. I dunno who he is now, but when I knew him in Sunset City he was called 'Spade' Hollister."

"Here comes Wooden-shoe," said Chet. "He's grinnin'; so I betcha he made a clean-up, too."

"Hundred and eighty dollars," announced Wooden-shoe joyfully. "Such an easy game to beat."

"Let's go home," suggested Leather. "This town ain't noways friendly, and I'm kinda curious to know what the beautiful maiden has done to the NR since we left."

"Go home—now!" Wooden-shoe was explosively surprized. "And me with a hundred and eighty?"

"Ain't noways fair to the heathen," admitted Chet.

"All right, I'm goin'," announced Leather, starting toward the hitch-rack.

"I'll trail yore bet, Leather."

Wheezer turned and followed Leather, but Chet and Wooden-shoe laughed derisively at such a foolish move, and went back to the Shoshone Saloon. That hundred and eighty dollars was burning a hole in Wooden-shoe's pocket, and the fact that Broken Butte was hostile to him made not the slightest difference.

Leather and Wheezer went back to the ranch. Miss Cleveland was sitting on the ranch-house porch, as they rode past, and motioned for them to stop. They dismounted and came up to her.

"Mr. Williams was here this morning, and I spoke to him in regards to your yearly salaries," she stated evenly. "He said that your claims were absurd. I quite agree with him. We have decided to pay you each forty dollars and dispense with your services, beginning tomorrow.

"Mr. Williams will be here in the morning and pay you off, I believe. I also spoke to him regarding Mrs. Coogan, and her claims, and he said that such a thing would be impossible."

"Yeah, I see," nodded Leather absently. "Williams is takin' quite a lot upon himself, ain't he, ma'am?"

"He is handling the legal matter for me."

"You known Eph Williams long, ma'am?"

She shook her head.

"You need somethin' beside legal advice, ma'am," said Wheezer solemnly. "That fish-eyed shyster'll git yuh into trouble, if yuh don't watch out."

"I am perfectly able to attend to my own affairs."

Miss Cleveland's tone chilled Wheezer, but he grinned widely.

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Leather dropped his reins and leaned against the railing of the porch.

"Ma'am, I'd like to talk to yuh a little," he said. "I ain't sayin' nothin' for me and the boys. We don't like this ranch—much. Losin' a job don't mean nothin' to us, but I'd like to say somethin' for Ma Coogan.

"Ma's old, ma'am. Must be past sixty. It ain't noways easy for her to land another job, don'tcha see? She's fine, Ma is. You won't find nobody like her. She's got to have a home. Old folks, like her, has got to have a home, don'tcha see, ma'am?"

Miss Cleveland studied Leather, as he talked, but he knew that she was not impressed with his argument.

"I am sorry," she said, "but Mr. Williams will handle that part of it for me. I have no doubt but that Mrs. Coogan is a fine cook, but Mr. Williams has advised that I change the personnel of this ranch entirely and I am following his advice. Of course, you know, I am not running a charitable institution."

"No, I didn't reckon yuh was," Leather sighed and picked up his reins.

For a moment he seemed downcast over her decision, but lifted his eyes and looked squarely into her face. Wheezer started instinctively forward as he saw the expression on Leather's face.

Wheezer knew that Leather was at white heat. He had seen that same expression on Leather's face before, and it meant that the devil within him had torn loose.

"Ma'am," Leather's tone was hoarse, as if he were suffering from a bad cold, "we ain't askin' for charity—ain't askin' nothin' from you—now. You own the NR ranch, and you can do what yuh please with it. Lookin' at you, I wonder what makes yore blood circulate. You ain't got no heart."

She sprang to her feet and faced him, and for a moment Wheezer thought she would attack him with her hands, but Leather's eyes did not waver and she stepped back, as if wondering.

"You coward!" she exclaimed. "To talk that way to a woman!"

"You are a woman," Leather nodded slowly. "But you are not a lady—not human."

"You get off this ranch!" Miss Cleveland bit her under-lip and pointed back to the road.

Leather shook his head.

"No. You own this ranch, but you don't know how much of it you don't own.

"What do you mean?"

"This is what I mean." Leather turned and pointed toward the rolling hills.

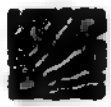
"There's a lot of NR cattle out in them hills, but you don't own many of them."

"Why—if they are NR brand—what do you mean?"

Leather laughed and walked off the porch to his horse, before he replied.

"Ask Eph Williams what I mean. If he don't know, I'll tell him. C'mon, Wheezer."

They led their horses down to the barn, while the girl looked after them, her face a mixture of emotions. Then she swore a good United States oath and went into the house.



IT WAS nearly daylight the next morning when Chet Wells rode up to the NR corral-fence, tied his horse and hammered loudly on the bunk-house door. After making considerable racket he kicked the door open and went inside, where he war-whooped, like an Indian.

"Shut up and come to bed," said Leather sleepily. "Whatcha think this is around here?"

"Yee-o-o-o-ow!" yelped Chet. "I'm a coyote!"

"Dang right yuh are," agreed Wheezer. "Crawl into a hole before a he-human collects yore ears. Chet, you —— brayin' burro, shut up!"

But Chet would not shut up. He climbed up on Wheezer's chest and sat down, while he sang—

"I'm a tough ol' jasper and I'm lookin' for a fight;
I'll cut, shoot or rassel from mornin' until night
With a whang de oodle addy aye, addy aye."

"Yeah, and you'll get it, too," declared Leather angrily.

"Woosh!"

Wheezer managed to dump Chet on to the floor and sat up, gasping for breath.

"Are yuh all woke up?" queried Chet. "My gosh, you sure are heavy sleepers!"

"Where's Wooden-shoe?"

"Wooden-shoe is in jail."

"In jail?"

"Yeah, in jail! Want me to yell it louder?"

"What for, Chet?"

"Talkin' too much."

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Leather slid out of bed and reached for the makings of a cigaret.

"Oh, he talked too much, eh?" said Wheezer. "If that was a crime, you'd 'a' been hung years ago, Chet. What did he talk about?"

"That wall-eyed bronc you sold to Clay Hardy. Yuh see—" Chet helped himself to Leather's tobacco and papers—"Clay and Murtch runs into me and Wooden-shoe, and they asks us to have a drink. We got to talkin' about that wall-eyed bronc, and Wooden-shoe, like a danged fool, tells 'em that he was the original owner. He says that you won it from him in a poker game out here."

"Well, s'pose he did," asked Wheezer. "What then?"

"Murtch asked Wooden-shoe who he got the bronc from and Wooden-shoe jist naturally can't say. Murtch says it's kinda funny, bein' as the bronc has got a D-Bar-D brand on its shoulder and no other marks.

"Well, Wooden-shoe's drinkin', which makes him foolish and he tells Murtch to go to ——. Then Murtch arrests him for stealin' a D-Bar-D horse."

"And that's a —— of a note!" exploded Wheezer.

"The D-Bar-D outfit is over in Foster County," volunteered Chet dismally. "Murtch says that the brand never was put on very deep, and the hair covered it."

"And if the D-Bar-D keeps a sale record —Wooden-shoe is in bad shape," said Leather. "Dang the luck, I don't know how we overlooked that brand. Cinch to burn on the two sides to that bar and make it a DAD brand."

"Which won't get Wooden-shoe out of jail now," Chet reminded them sadly.

"We vented a lot of D-Bar-D's, if I remember," said Wheezer thoughtfully, "and if that outfit comes over to identify that wall-eyed bronc they'll likely kinda look around for more."

"Yuh can't identify a vented brand," said Chet.

"No, but yuh can get —— suspicious of an outfit with as many as the NR has on the range. Believe me, gents, I'm plumb ready to pull m' freight."

"What we need is a lawyer," grinned Leather.

"I betcha we do," Chet was serious.

"Might hire Eph Williams," grinned Wheezer.

"Yeah, we might do worse," nodded Leather. "He's just crooked enough to defend a bunch of horse thieves and get away with it. I s'pose he'd want us to give him a bill of sale of the animals we stole."

Chet kicked off his boots and stretched out on the bunk, where he proceéded to snore loudly. It was too early to dress; so Leather and Wheezer crawled back under their blankets again, and in a few minutes there was a trio of snores.

It was about eight o'clock when Leather and Wheezer got out of bed and slid into their clothes. Chet still snored loudly, but they did not wake him up. Wheezer went to the window and looked toward the ranch-house.

"Horse and buggy up there," he announced. "Reckon the sweet lady's guardian angel has arrived already."

They finished dressing and went up toward the house. Eph Williams backed out of the door, carrying one end of a trunk, the other end of which was being carried by a Chinaman.

Williams merely glanced at the two cowboys and went back into the house, followed by the Chinaman.

"Well, whatcha know about that?" grunted Wheezer.

They walked around to the back door, where they found Ma Coogan sitting on the wash-bench. Her old face was streaked with tears, and she was wearing a very old alpaca dress, which she had not worn for years, and beside her on the bench was a little old hat with a moth-eaten feather.

She looked up at them, but did not speak. Leather frowned and hitched at his belt as he and Wheezer looked at each other queerly.

"I—I'm goin'—somewhere," said Ma Coogan painfully. "They got a Chinaman."

She did not look up at them. Leather turned away and rubbed his chin violently. Then he whirled on Wheezer.

"Go down and wake up Chet and saddle the horses. We'll have to bust that jail and get Wooden-shoe out and——"

Wheezer whirled to go back to the bunk-house, but Leather stopped him.

"Wait. That won't do no good either. I was going to kill that —— lawyer, but that won't help Ma."

"Bless your hearts," Ma looked up at them. "Sure, ye don't need to worry about me."

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"No, I reckon not," said Leather softly, "but we don't want to have to eat Chink cookin', Ma."

"But the Lord love ye, we're all fired."

"That's right. I'll have to see that lawyer. Set still."

Leather hurried around the house and Wheezer almost trod on his heels. Williams and Miss Cleveland were on the porch, and the Chinaman was putting the trunk into position to load it on to the back of the buggy.

"Whose trunk is that?" asked Leather.

"Mrs. Coogan's," said Williams defiantly.

Leather strode out to the Chinaman and pointed at the trunk.

"Roll it back to the porch, John."

The Chinaman squinted at Leather and then at Williams.

"Didja hear what I said?" asked Leather.

"Yessah."

The Chinaman tried to grin, but it was a weak effort.

"Then roll it back like I told yuh to do."

"Just a moment."

Williams grew very indignant and came down the steps.

"Let that trunk alone."

"Roll it over to the porch, John," ordered Leather. And then to Williams:

"Yo're on thin ice, pardner. Keep out of the argument."

The Chinaman rolled the trunk back to the porch.

"Now, get into that buggy," ordered Leather, and the Chinaman lost no time in obeying. He had lived long in the range-country and knew better than to refuse an armed cowboy.

"You are just wasting your breath," stated Williams with a weak smile. "Being armed, you have the advantage—for the moment."

With a quick twist of his wrist, Leather flipped the gun from his holster and tossed it aside.

"Now, whatcha say?" he asked softly.

"My dear man, there is no use of a quarrel."

Williams spread his hands and shrugged his shoulders. He tried to be friendly, but it was all lost on Leather.

"Yo're seven-eighths coyote and—no, I won't say that either. There's two skunks in Broken Butte, and yo're both of 'em."

"You seem determined to quarrel with me, I see," said Williams sadly. "I am only doing my duty, Kleig.

"Yeah?"

Leather considered Williams for a space of time and nodded slowly.

"I reckon yo're all right, Williams. I never trust a man that'll back down. Shake, will yuh?"

Leather shoved out his hand, and Williams, a look of wonder on his face, shook hands solemnly with him. Wheezer swallowed with great difficulty and kicked himself on the ankle to see if he was asleep. Miss Cleveland's face expressed astonishment, and even the Chinaman's expressionless face changed its placid contour for a moment.

"I want to talk with yuh kinda private," said Leather softly. "Mebbe we better go down to the bunk-house, eh? C'mon, Wheezer."

Williams swallowed painfully, wonderingly and looked at Miss Cleveland, but followed behind them to the bunk-house steps, where they sat down.

"I ain't never hired a lawyer before," stated Leather, "and I dunno just how to go about tellin' him things. Is it a fact that what yuh tell a lawyer is kinda—uh——"

"I think I know what you mean," nodded Williams. "Whatever you tell me will be sacred."

"Yeah, that's the word I was huntin' for," grinned Leather. "Yo're educated, Williams, and I sure like to talk to educated folks."

Wheezer choked over his cigaret and dug his heels into the dirt. He wanted to yell out loud. Williams accepted the compliment as his just due.

"It better be sacred," said Leather, "or four good punchers will swell the census of the penitentiary."

Williams pricked up his ears, but tried to appear unconcerned.

Leather glanced sideways at him, but Williams was rubbing his chin thoughtfully and trying to control his elation. He had been insulted many times by these four wild-riding cowpunchers, and he was more than willing to have them bare their guilty secrets.

"I ain't doin' this so much for us as I am for the lady," explained Leather slowly. "She thinks she inherited somethin', pardner."

"Ahem-m-m!"

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Williams cleared his throat raspingly, but waited for Leather to continue.

"It dates back quite a while," continued Leather. "Yuh see, old Nick Ralls wasn't no saint. The NR wasn't no payin' proposition and old Nick was just about at the *hondo* end of his rope when we showed up.

"We kinda made him a proposition. It's hard for a cattle-rustler to dispose of stock these days, don'tcha know it?"

"I—er—shouldn't be surprized," nodded Williams.

"Anyway," continued Leather, "here's what was done. The four of us misbranded every danged critter we could find. We worked plumb over into Foster County. 'Course we didn't steal a lot of Broken Butte cows, but there's a few.

"We branded 'em with the NR iron, and Nick Ralls was to do the sellin'. His idea was to make the old NR look like a regular cow-ranch and sell out the whole works. Then he was to split the money; *sabe?*"

Williams squinted painfully at Leather. Somehow he could hardly believe that statement, and wondered where the joke came in. But Leather's face was serious.

"You—you are not joking?" asked Williams.

"Dontcha believe it. I ain't tryin' to excuse us. The NR owes us plenty of money, which we've got to collect, but I just wanted yuh to know how we stand, and how the lady—well, yuh can see what she inherited."

"Yes, yes!" Williams seemed to be doing a lot of fast thinking. "Do you think there is any danger of an investigation? Is there —nobody suspects you, do they?"

"Here's the point." Leather tapped Williams on the shoulder and lowered his voice. "Yesterday we sold a horse to Clay Hardy. We didn't know it, but that horse had a D-Bar-D brand on its shoulder. Murtch arrested Wooden-shoe Van Dorn and throwed him in jail.

"Murtch is goin' to send word to the D-Bar-D outfit, over in Foster County, and find out how it comes that we had that horse." Leather pointed out toward the hills and laughed grimly. "Them hills are full of D-Bar-D cows, with the brands vented and the NR run on.

"If that outfit comes over here to see about that wall-eyed bronc, they'll start lookin' for other stock they've lost, don'tcha see?"

"That's right. But you vented the brands——"

"Yeah, and there'll be a —— of a lot for us to explain if they find out about all them vented brands. It'll look kinda bad, don't think?"

Williams got to his feet.

"You sit tight, all of you," he ordered. "I'll stop Murtch, if it isn't too late."

He hurried toward the buggy, sprang in beside the Chinaman and whirled the horse around. Miss Cleveland called to him, but he put whip to horse and turned out of the ranch-house gate on two wheels.

Leather watched him disappear in a cloud of dust and then looked wonderingly at Wheezer.

"He—he's in a hurry," observed Wheezer.

Leather looked back up the road and nodded slowly, as a smile creased his thin features.

"Whatcha want to—" began Wheezer, but Leather stopped him.

"Don't talk to me, Wheezer! Lemme think, will yuh? I've got an idea, but some of the parts are missin'."

Chet Wells opened the door behind them and blinked into the sunlight.

"Leather hired Williams for our lawyer, Chet," said Wheezer solemnly.

"Yeah, I heard it," nodded Chet. "I heard old fish-eye's voice; so I glued m' ear to the door. Whatcha tryin' to do—put us in the penitentiary, Leather?"

"He won't talk to yuh," stated Wheezer. "He's thinkin', Chet."

"She's about time he done a little thinkin'. He sure didn't do any thinkin' when he told our shame to that danged lawyer."

Leather got to his feet and went to the house. Ma Coogan was still sitting on the wash-bench, waiting for Williams to take her away. She looked up at him and he grinned softly.

"Ma, you take off that dress," he ordered kindly. "You can't cook no breakfast, all dressed up thataway."

"Cook breakfast? The Lord love ye, I'm——"

"Williams has gone back with his Chinaman, Ma. You go right back and fry us a flock of eggs. Mebbe there ain't goin' to be no change."

"Do ye mean that, boy?" Ma got to her feet and put a trembling hand on his arm. "Ye're not jokin', are ye?"

Leather shook his head.

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"No, I'm not, Ma. You're still the chief cook of the NR ranch. The lawyer feels kinda different than he did a while ago."

"Sure, I dunno what to say." The old lady's eyes sparkled with happiness as she looked around and picked up her old hat. "It's like wakin' from a bad dream, so it is. God is good to me, Leather Kleig. I'm goin' to fry thim eggs—now."

She stopped in the doorway and looked back at him, the tears running down her face, but went on into her beloved kitchen. Leather blinked uncertainly and shoved down on his cartridge-belt, after which he went around the house and picked up the six-shooter he had discarded.

Jane Cleveland was standing on the porch and she looked curiously at him. He grinned at her and gazed down the road.

"The lawyer went away in a hurry," he observed. "I reckon I better carry Ma's trunk back into her room."

"I do not understand it," she said.

"Neither do I," he admitted, swinging the trunk back on to the porch, "but I reckon it'll be all right, ma'am."

He deposited the trunk in Ma Coogan's little room and came back to the porch, but Jane Cleveland had gone to her room.

It was about three hours later that Wooden-shoe rode into the ranch and dismounted at the bunk-house. He was grinning widely.

"Bust out?" queried Chet.

"Huh!" Wooden-shoe grinned knowingly. "Much obliged to yuh. That sheriff was mad enough to eat hay. How did you fellers manage to sneak in and vent that brand last night?"

"Eh?" grunted Wheezer. "Whatcha mean?"

"Aw-w-w!"

Wooden-shoe turned the horse around and showed them the left shoulder of the animal, where a hot iron had completely destroyed any possibility of ever deciphering the original brand.

"That's a good joke," grinned Wooden-shoe. "Murtch was awful sore. He said it was a —— good thing that he hadn't sent word to the D-Bar-D. He knows who done it, but he can't prove it, and he knows that, too."

Chet and Wheezer looked inquiringly at Leather, but he merely grinned and nodded.

"Well, what's the answer?" queried Chet wonderingly.

"Our lawyer is workin'," Leather said with a chuckle.

"Kinda looks like it," admitted Wheezer. "But lawyers come pretty high, don't they? How are we goin' to pay him, Leather?"

"I dunno—yet."

THAT afternoon the four cowpunchers saddled their horses and headed for Broken Butte. There was nothing for them to do at the ranch—and they still had money left.

Miss Cleveland had spent most of the day in the shade of the porch, reading, while Ma Coogan lifted her quavering voice in song in the kitchen.

Half-way to town they met Eph Williams, driving toward the ranch. He drew up his horse and smiled, or rather smirked at them.

"You sure got into action real fast," said Leather, "and we're sure much obliged to yuh, Williams."

"Yes, I think it was well handled, Kleig. Now, my advice to all of you would be to leave this country as soon as possible. In defense of my client I shall bend every effort to protect what is legally her property.

"As far as your salary claims are concerned, I am afraid they can not be met. Miss Cleveland has no money, and Nick Ralls left nothing but property, which would be hard to dispose of right away."

"Yeah, that's right, I reckon," nodded Leather, "but it ain't hardly fair to us. I'll tell yuh what we might do: We might each take twenty-five head of beef steers and sell 'em. They're worth about twenty dollars on the hoof right now."

"Well—" Williams smiled weakly—"I'd hardly advise that either."

"How many would we take for Ma's share?" queried Chet seriously.

"Hard to tell." Leather rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Ranch cooks gets about fifty per month, and if yuh figure that out for ten years and divide it by twenty—it would be quite a few cows."

"Be about three hundred head," said Chet. "We'll take four hundred head of NR steers and call it square."

Williams shook his head quickly.

"No, that would not be hardly fair to Miss Cleveland. She had nothing to do with this matter, and all claims against the estate must be in a form that the court would consider. Verbal agreements are,

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I am sure, something that would hardly be considered in a court of law."

"Well, we'll kinda hang around," stated Leather. "Yuh never can tell what might happen. I think that old Nick was plumb loco when he wrote that will."

"Not at all, Kleig; he was perfectly sane—perfectly."

"I dunno how he got thataway," grinned Wheezer. "He sure was always loco before."

They rode on toward town, and Williams went on toward the NR. Leather was very thoughtful. There was the germ of an idea in his mind—a far-fetched feeling that it was a bright idea, and he grinned softly under the brim of his sombrero.

There was a big poker game in progress in the Shoshone when they came in. Battler Morgan, "King" Cole, a big horse raiser from the south end of the range, Jim Kelly, owner of the general merchandise store, Clay Hardy and Spade Hollister.

A number of men were watching the play, among them being Murtch. He scowled at the four cowpunchers, and moved around to the far side of the table. Spade Hollister glanced up at Leather, who was standing almost behind Clay Hardy, and half-nodded in recognition. Leather watched Spade closely—especially when he was dealing. His long, slender fingers dealt with baffling speed, but there was little chance for crooked play.

"Deal 'em a little slower, if yuh don't mind."

Clay Hardy was losing and inclined to be nasty about it.

"I didn't learn poker in a hay-loft," said Spade softly, and King Cole laughed heartily.

Clay Hardy scowled, as he picked up his hand, but did not reply. Leather glanced down at Hardy and noticed that Hardy's holster was empty. A closer inspection showed that Mr. Hardy had the gun on his lap.

Leather's lips tightened perceptibly. It looked to him as if Hardy was anticipating trouble. Leather glanced at Murtch who had moved from behind Hollister and was almost directly behind King Cole.

Clay lost that pot and swore softly at his luck. Spade glanced keenly at Hardy and flashed a look at Murtch.

"Spade's the one Clay's watchin'," observed Leather to himself, "and Spade knows it."

Battler Morgan dealt and the pot was passed. Hardy failed to deal openers and the deal passed to Kelly. On Kelly's deal, Cole passed. Spade deliberated, but passed, and Battler opened moderately.

Hardy tilted the pot heavily, which caused Cole and Kelly to pass, but Spade called the raise and boosted the pot a hundred dollars. Battler passed and Hardy called. It took all of his chips, except one small stack of whites.

Leather watched the draw closely. Hardy tossed his discards on to the table, spinning them just a trifle too far, and two of them slid in front of Hollister, who brushed them aside.

Spade drew one card and Hardy drew three. He peered at the corners of his cards and his right hand drew off the table and dropped to his lap. Spade passed. For a moment Clay Hardy's eyes squinted grimly at Spade and his lips tightened. Then—

"Pass," he said softly.

Spade flipped his cards over. He had three kings and a pair of nines. Hardy leaned across and looked at them. Then he exposed his hand.

"Aces and sevens," muttered Battler.

"Yeah, aces and sevens," said Hardy, "and they'd 'a' been good, if that —— tin-horn gambler hadn't stole the king I discarded."

For an instant there was a dead silence. Then Spade jerked back in his chair. Quick as a flash, Clay Hardy's hand came up over the table-top, gripping a revolver, but before he could level it at Hollister, Leather had flung himself across Hardy, blocking him and tearing the gun out of his hand.

Then he upset Hardy, who went sprawling and cursing against the corner of the wall.

Leather staggered sidewise, caught his balance and faced the crowd. The players had got to their feet and were looking at Hardy, who was swearing vengeance and getting to his feet.

"Lucky thing yuh blocked him, Kleig," said King Cole. "He sure gets his gun quick."

Leather was facing Hardy now, and Hardy was frothing with anger, but mindful of the gun which Leather was holding against his ribs.

"Yeah, he gets a gun quick," smiled Leather, "but he got it off his lap—not out of his holster."

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"He stole my discard!" panted Hardy. "I tell yuh——"

"You're a liar," said Leather softly. "I watched him. You discarded in to him to get an excuse to kill him. You wasn't goin' to give him an even break."

"What's that to you, you horse-thief?"

Clay Hardy spat out the question loud enough for every one in the place to hear. Leather did not move for a moment. He seemed to be deliberating just what to do. Then he handed King Cole the gun he had taken from Hardy.

"Put that in his holster," he said softly.

Cole looked curiously at him, but stepped over and dropped the gun into Hardy's holster. Hardy's hands were hanging loosely at his sides, and he was hunched forward staring at Leather, who had lifted his right hand waist-high above the butt of his holstered-gun.

"Hardy," Leather's voice was low pitched, "you're a dirty coyote pup. You spoke out of turn just now, and I'm givin' yuh a chance to see if you've got guts enough to reach for a gun. I'm waitin'."

Hardy's face looked pinched and white now, and he was breathing fast. His eyes flashed around, as though wanting some one to interfere. Then his eyes came back to Leather Kleig and his knees quivered.

Then his hand came slowly up to his mouth and the back of it trembled across his dry lips. He turned and went out of the door, striking his shoulder against the side, like a drunken man who is not sure of his step.

"He's whipped," stated King Cole hoarsely. "Didja ever see a man get scared thataway? My ——, it sure was worth seein'."

"Yeah, he sure turned yaller," agreed Battler, turning back to his chair. "I s'pose that busts up a perfectly good game."

Murtch had nothing to say. Spade Hollister seemed to watch him closely, but Murtch did not look toward him. Battler cashed in the chips and invited every one to have a drink, but Murtch went out without accepting the invitation.

Spade Hollister came over to Leather and stood beside him at the bar.

"Kleig, I'm much obliged to you," he said.

"Tha'sall right," said Leather gruffly. "I wouldn't 'a' said a word, if you'd 'a' stole that king."

Spade looked curiously at him and back to the bartender, who was taking their order. Wheezer, Chet and Wooden-shoe were at the bar, chuckling among themselves over what had just happened.

They drank and moved away from the bar. Hollister looked at Leather, who started away from the bar. He half-smiled and stepped over beside him.

"Kleig, if I can ever help yuh in any way—just speak the word."

Leather turned and looked keenly at him.

"Spade Hollister, I'd 'a' done that for any man. I'm no angel, but I'd have to hate —— out of a man to stand by and see him murdered. I s'pose you know what it was all about, don'tcha? Then yuh know who to look out for. If I need yuh —I'll yelp."

"And I'll come," nodded Spade as he turned and walked over to a roulette lay-out.

The other three cowboys edged up to Leather and they grouped together near the door.

"Cowboy, yuh sure work fast," applauded Wheezer, slapping Leather on the shoulder. "And yuh sure put the fear of —— into Clay Hardy."

"Yeah, but look out for him," cautioned Wooden-shoe. "He's whipped, but he ain't dead. That gambler sure owes you a lot. In another second he'd have been plugged."

"And what for?" questioned Wheezer. "He's a plumb stranger here, ain't he? What's Clay Hardy gunnin' at a stranger for, I wonder?"

Leather shook his head and turned to King Cole, who came up to him. Cole grinned and slapped Leather on the shoulder.

"Kleig, I hear that you've got a female boss out at the NR. It can't be done. If you fellers need a new job, come down to the KC horse outfit and go to work. It's the same old forty-a-month and eats."

Leather smiled and shook his head.

"Yuh heard Clay Hardy call me a horse-thief, didn't yuh Cole?"

"Yeah, and yuh never denied it. Yuh never did steal many horses, did yuh?"

"Half a dozen, mebbe."

"Pshaw, that don't make yuh a horse-thief. Some folks draws the line too close."

Cole laughed at his own wit and went to the door, where he turned.

"That offer holds good. Come any old time."

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"Thank yuh, Cole," grinned Leather.

"Well, that's a job, if we need it," said Chet.

"If we need it," nodded Leather.

The cowboys went back to the games, but Leather did not play. He took a seat against the wall, where he tilted back and appeared to be half-asleep. Once he counted his money carefully and stowed it away in the watch-pocket of his overalls.

There was no sign of Murtch nor Hardy. The afternoon wore away, and the oil chandeliers of the Shoshone were lighted. It was Saturday night and there was a heavy influx of cowboys.

The three-piece orchestra began screeching, and the dance-hall girls were out in force, mingling with the men. Wheezer, Chet and Wooden-shoe were firmly implanted in different games; so Leather crossed the street alone to a restaurant. The waiter was the same Chinese that Williams had brought to the ranch, and he grinned in a friendly manner at Leather.

"No *sabe*," he told Leather seriously. "Catchum job quick, lose 'm allesame."

"Yuh didn't last long, that's a fact, John."

"No last. Man swear alletime. Velly mad, I t'ink. W'at you like eat, eh?"

"What did he say about us, John?"

"No talk 'bout you—talk 'bout God. Yo' *sabe?*"

"Religious, eh?"

"'Ligious? Yo' mean—same like wo'-ship?"

"Yeah, like worship, John."

The Chinaman grinned and shook his head.

"No like. Yo' wan' soup?"

Leather finished his meal and went outside. He was a trifle cautious, for fear that Clay Hardy mighty try to ambush him. He knew that Clay would welcome a chance to get even for what had happened in the Shoshone, but he was sure that Clay would never face him in the light.

He strolled up the street and was going past the Broken Butte hotel, but stopped and stared in the window. Then he whirled around and went quickly inside. Ma Coogan was sitting in one of the hotel chairs against the wall, her hands folded in her lap.

She looked up as he came in and a smile wreathed her wrinkled old face.

"Sure I've been wonderin' if I'd see you," she said.

"Well, what are you doin' here, Ma?" he demanded.

"I was brought here by the lawyer. Ah! I think it's no use, Leather. He came this afternoon and had a long talk with Miss Cleveland, and thin—" Ma Coogan stopped and shook her head sadly—"and thin they loaded my trunk in the back of the buggy and made me come along."

"I see." Leather's face hardened and he squinted thoughtfully. "He waited until we were gone. Have you got a room here, Ma?"

She shook her head.

"Leather, I have no money. Ye well know that Nick Ralls only gave me a home and——"

Leather turned and strode over to the desk.

"Give this lady a room," he demanded. "She's got a trunk somewhere. Here—" He tossed a twenty dollar gold piece on the desk—"that's enough for now. When that's gone, I've got more."

"Yeah, sure, I'll fix her up," said the frowsy-looking clerk. "Dollar a day's the best we've got."

Leather went back to Ma and handed her another twenty.

"Yuh got to eat, Ma. This feller'll fix yuh up for a room. Now don'tcha worry about anythin'."

He patted her on the shoulder and escaped out of the door before she fully realized what he had done.

"YO'RE a —— of a gunman, ain't-cha!" Murtch snorted angrily, but it had little effect on Clay Hardy, who sat hunched up in one of their office chairs, chewing tobacco violently. He only increased his mastications per minute.

Murtch jerked a chair into position and flopped down, facing Hardy.

"Everythin' worked wrong," complained Hardy nervously. "If that —— Kleig hadn't come in when he did and put the whole thing into a jam."

"Yuh had an even break with him."

"Yeah—with him."

"Scared of him, eh?"

"I ain't no crazy suicide, Murtch."

"You was plumb scared to breathe, Clay."

"Uh-huh. You'd 'a' been the same. He's got under yore hide, and yuh never call him for it, Murtch. How did I know that Kleig was goin' to block me?"

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"You was a fool to have that gun in your lap."

"Yeah," nodded Clay seriously, "I was a fool to have a gun a-tall. I ought to pack a doughnut."

Murtch laughed hoarsely.

"Well, I reckon it kinda spoils our plans, but there's more than one way to skin a cat. We've got the goods on that NR gang, if we want to use it."

"Yo're the boss, Murtch. All I ask is that yuh don't get me into no mix-up with 'em. They don't use no judgment. Law and order don't mean nothin' to that bunch, and a sheriff's star looks like a bulls-eye to them."

"I'd hate to hear what folks will say about you, after the way yuh acted in front of Kleig."

"I'd a —— sight rather be able to hear 'em say I backed down than to not hear 'em say I was crazy to try to beat Kleig on the draw."

"Well, there might be somethin' to that. Let's go and see what Williams has got to say."

They locked up the office and went up the street to Williams' place. He had but lately arrived from the ranch and greeted them with a grin.

"I brought the old woman down with me," he explained. "So that's that much done. I'll take the Chink out there again in the morning. What did you do on that other proposition?"

Briefly, but with sundry oaths, Murtch told of what had happened in the Shoshone. Hardy made no comments. Williams scowled deeply and tapped on the table-top with his finger-tips.

"What do yuh advise?" asked Murtch.

"Sitting tight. There has been too many mistakes. There will be a howl raised when they find that the old woman has been discharged. Miss Cleveland did not want to stay out there alone, but I assured her that everything would be all right."

"Well, I hope yo're right," nodded Murtch getting to his feet. "If that bunch get drunk, yuh never can tell what they'll do. They think a lot of the old woman."

"Pshaw! What does a horse-thief care about an old woman? They've got enough to look after, if they keep themselves out of jail."

"All right. We'll figger things out in the mornin'. Come on, Clay."

They went out and closed the door. Williams lighted a frayed cigar and opened his safe, which was set into the wall behind his desk. It was an old-fashioned safe, which opened with a key.

He took out a mass of papers and looked them over in the light of his lamp. For a long time he studied them and then replaced them in the safe, after which he pocketed the key.

As he turned down the lamp, preparatory to blowing it out, there came a knock on the door. He hesitated for a moment and seemed about to call out, but changed his mind and went to the door. He turned the knob and looked outside.

There was no one in sight. He leaned out and glanced down the street. Then something crashed down upon his head and he fell backward into the room.

IT WAS about three o'clock in the morning when Wheezer, Chet and Wooden-shoe decided to go back to the ranch. None of them had seen Leather, and, as his horse was missing from the hitch-rack, they decided that he had preceded them to the NR.

The gods of the green cloth had not been good to the trio, and there was little merriment within them as they left Broken Butte.

"I'm as clean as the dew," said Wheezer sadly. "I spent m' substance in tryin' t' make two-pair beat three of a kind."

"Yuh ought to play roulette," observed Wooden-shoe. "Get yuh a little system, that's all yuh need."

"How much you got left?" demanded Chet.

"I still got my system left—and a four-bit piece."

"I sure hope that Leather's got some money left," said Chet. "My pesos has all gone where the woodbine twineth and the pelican trilleth to its mate."

They unsaddled their horses and went up to the bunk-house door. It was bright moonlight, almost as light as day, and their eyes beheld a great and varied assortment of things piled on the steps.

They looked the things over carefully and grunted their amazement.

"Looks like somebody done moved us out," observed Wheezer. "What's on the door?"

He climbed over the stuff and studied a square of white paper which was tacked

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on the door. He scratched a match and read the message aloud.

"Notice. Any one entering this building without my permission will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law."

Wheezer whistled softly and looked back at them.

"And she's signed by Miss Jane Cleveland, owner of the NR ranch."

"Door locked?" asked Chet.

"Locked ——! It's nailed tight."

"Well," observed Wooden-shoe optimistically, "it's a good thing that it ain't Winter and zero weather."

"That's a —— of a thing to be joyful about."

Wheezer climbed back and sat down on a pile of blankets.

"I wonder where Leather is."

"Prob'ly asleep in the barn," said Chet. "That —— lawyer sure foxed us, didn't he? That whippoorwill ain't workin' for us, that's a cinch, and I'm goin' to curry him to the queen's taste. Yessir, I'm goin' to hit him so hard that he'll have a permanent part in his hair."

"I hope," said Wooden-shoe, "he dies before his time comes."

"Let's go down to the barn and join Leather in the hay," suggested Wheezer. "Mebbe there ain't no notice on the hayloft."

They filed down to the big barn and crawled into the loft, which still contained a ton or so of hay, but Leather was not there.

"Prob'ly never left town," said Wheezer as he burrowed into the hay. "Gosh dang it, we'll wake up full of fox-tail, I betcha."

He was facing the opening of the loft, a doorless opening, about six-feet square, which gave him a view of the ranch-house yard and the big gate. The moon was partly obscured for a few minutes, which made objects rather hazy, but he saw a horseman coming toward the gate, traveling slowly.

"Here comes Leather," he stated. "Let him see the notice, et cettery, and then listen to him cuss."

The others shifted their positions to watch him. He was almost under the arch of the gate, when a streak of orange-colored flame seemed to spurt up at him from a brush-tangle just beyond, and the thud of a revolver shot broke the stillness.

The boys in the loft were unable to see just what did happen, but the rider was shooting now. Another spurt of flame came from the tangle. Three times the rider's gun spat fire, the reports mingling with those from the brush.

"My ——, what's goin' on?" gasped Wheezer, almost falling out of the loft opening.

"There he goes!" exclaimed Chet.

The rider had turned and was riding rapidly away, the sound of the galloping horse dying away in the distance.

They tumbled out of the loft and raced toward the gate, each man carrying a gun in his hand. Out through the gate they ran and stopped in the road.

"Over here!" panted Wheezer. "He was shootin' from that bunch of—look out! There he is."

A man was lying sprawled on his face in the tangle, and the moonlight glinted on his revolver, which was lying on the ground near him. They did not need to turn him over to see it was Clay Hardy.

"Whatcha know?" panted Chet. "The dirty bushwhacker!"

"Yeah, he shot first," agreed Wheezer. "I seen him shoot first. Wonder if he's dead."

"Feel of his heart," said Wooden-shoe. "If it ain't beatin', he's dead."

"It sure takes brains to know that!" grunted Chet.

Wheezer turned him over and felt of his heart. It was beating jerkily.

"He ain't dead—yet. What'll we do with him?"

"Take him to a doctor," suggested Wooden-shoe.

"And go to the pen for shootin' him?" queried Chet.

"He got cultivated on the head," stated Wheezer. "A bullet sure danced a jig on his noodle, but I don't reckon it went through. Was that Leather?"

"Looks like it might 'a' been. Him and Hardy had a run-in, and I'll betcha Hardy sneaked out here and laid for him. He never budged when we came through."

Chet walked back down the road, where a number of cottonwoods made a black blotch against the sky. Just to the left of them grew a tangle of stunted willows.

"Here's his horse!" called Chet, and went over into the willows after it.

They could see the outlines of the ranch-house, but the shooting had not caused any

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one to light a lamp nor come to investigate.

"I'll betcha that Cleopatra's scared stiff," said Wheezer.

"Cleopatra ain't got a —— thing on me if she is," declared Wooden-shoe. "I'm scared, too, y'betcha."

Chet came back with the saddled horse and they boosted Clay Hardy aboard.

"We've got to have ropes to hold him on with," said Chet, as they tried to balance the swaying figure. "We'll take him over to the barn and rope him on good, and then we'll saddle up and take him to town."

IT TOOK Eph Williams a long time to wake up from the smash on his head. He had been hit a solid clip and things were rather hazy in his mind for some time. It cost him considerable pain to crawl over to his chair, where he sat and recuperated.

He was not in the best physical condition and he cursed himself weakly, while he wondered what had happened to him. A bump the size of an egg on his head attested to the fact that something had hit him—and hit him hard.

Gradually he recovered sufficiently to try to analyze what had really occurred. He knew now that some one had knocked him down. Who it was and why, he did not know. He examined the contents of his pockets, but everything was intact. The safe was locked, the papers on his desk all in place.

"Must have been a personal matter," he observed thankfully, but was unable to blame any certain person. A lawyer of his type makes many enemies.

He secured some water and bathed his head carefully, after which he took a bottle of whisky from his desk and indulged freely. It was nearly daylight now. He looked at his watch, tried to put his hat on over the knob on his head, but decided it was too painful; so he went outside bare-headed, locked his office and went down to see Murtch.

Murtch was not ready to get out of bed, and he swore peevishly at Williams, who persisted on hammering on the front door of the office. Finally Murtch came and opened the door.

"Now, what in —— do you want?"

"Somebody hit me on the head," explained Williams.

"Yeah?" Murtch was very sarcastic. "Prob'ly didn't want to hurt yuh, so they hit yuh on the head."

"Must have had a gun or something," said Williams, feeling tenderly of his recently acquired swelling.

"What's the joke?"

"No joke," Williams shook his head. "I tell you, I got knocked down in the doorway of my own office. Look at my head."

Murtch examined the swelling and his demeanor changed.

"Come on inside."

Murtch lighted a lamp and drew on his pants and boots.

"Now, who hit yuh, Eph?"

"I don't know. A while after you left I heard some one knock. I went to the door, stuck my head outside—and got hit. I tell you, it made me sick."

"Huh!"

Murtch drew out his watch and glanced at it.

"You must 'a' been knocked out quite a while."

"Yes, I think so. I didn't come down here right away, because I was too sick. I haven't the slightest idea of why it was done. I was not robbed and there is nothing missing from my office."

"That's danged queer," observed Murtch. "Yo're sure they didn't take anythin'?"

"Not a thing. Where is Clay Hardy?"

"I dunno. He got sore at me and went away. Mebbe I talked a little too tough to suit him."

Williams rubbed his sore head and thought deeply.

"Those cowpunchers have likely gone back to the ranch," he said thoughtfully, "and I've promised to bring that Chinaman out there this morning, but I don't feel like it."

"I'll take him out," offered Murtch.

"You will? Well—" thoughtfully—"perhaps that would be better. You see, I nailed up the bunk-house door, after I moved out all their things, and put a trespass notice on the door."

"And yuh think it would be better, eh? No wonder yuh don't want to go out there. Moved 'em out and nailed the door, eh?"

"Miss Cleveland suggested it."

"The —— she did! I thought you was supposed to be her adviser."

Williams tried to grin, but it was a sorry effort. Murtch looked again at his watch.

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"What time does that Chink restaurant open?"

Williams shook his head.

"What difference——"

"Lot of difference. If I can get that Chink now, I can get him out there on the job before they wake up."

"We can find out. If they're not up, we'll wake 'em."

Murtch put on his coat and they went to the restaurant. There was no sign of life, so they went to the rear, where the proprietor and his hired help slept in a sort of a shed-like annex.

Murtch hammered on the door and a sleepy-eyed Celestial shuffled into view. It was the proprietor of the restaurant, and to him Murtch explained what he wanted.

"Yo' want same boy like yo' take before?"

"Yeah, the same one. Catchum good job. Same ranch."

The Chinaman turned and hurled a volley of words toward the rear of the shed. Began a conversation which lasted fully a minute. Then the proprietor shook his head.

"Boy say no."

"Lemme see him," said Murtch, and a moment later the Chinaman came to the door.

"Good job this time, John," explained Murtch. "You go with me and take charge of the same ranch-house."

"Same place we go before?"

"Yeah, same place, John."

"No can do."

"No can do! Whatcha talkin' about? This good job?"

"No can do," said the Chinaman stolidly, and went back to his bed.

The proprietor shut the door softly and barred it from within.

Murtch and Williams went back to the street.

"Whatcha goin' to do?" queried Murtch. "There ain't no other chinks and we can't get a white cook. If you'd had any sense you'd 'a' left the old woman there."

"Things are in an awful tangle," agreed Williams. "An awful tangle."

"Now, that made a —— of an impression on my mind," said Murtch angrily. "You've balled up everything. I'll go out and explain things to Miss Cleveland. She's got such —— good ideas, such as nailing up bunk-house doors and posting notices—mebbe she'll see a way out of this."

Murtch hurried after his horse and rode toward the NR ranch. It was daylight now, and Murtch hoped he would not meet any of the NR cowpunchers. Not that Murtch was afraid, but their rough humor was too pointed to suit him.

About two miles out of town he ran into them. There was no way to dodge them, so he drew up in the center of the road and tried to think of a reason for being there so early in the morning. He inwardly cursed Eph Williams for nailing that bunk-house door.

Then he saw that there was a fourth man, roped to his saddle and riding in an unusual position. They drew up near him, their faces very serious, and waited for him to speak. He knew at a glance who the fourth rider was and he frowned wonderingly.

"Somebody shot him," offered Wheezer. "We found him and was takin' him to the doctor."

Murtch rode in closer to Hardy and tried to get a look at his face.

"He ain't dead, is he?"

"Wasn't when we started," said Chet, "but he ain't in the best of health right now."

"No?" Murtch glanced around at them. "Where did yuh find him?"

He emphasized "find" very strongly.

"None of that!" snapped Wheezer quickly. "We didn't have nothin' to do with it. Hardy tried to bushwhack somebody and got leaded for his trouble."

"Did, eh? Who was that somebody?"

"We dunno."

"Dunno, eh? Where's Kleig?"

"Dunno that either."

"Thasso?"

"Why argue with the danged fool?" queried Wooden-shoe. "He's got his mind fixed. Give him his second-hand deputy and let's go back and finish our sleep."

"That's a good idea," agreed Wheezer, handing the lead rope to Murtch. "He can take better care of Hardy than we can."

"Wait a minute!" snapped Murtch. "You can't pull nothing like that. You come back with me—all of yuh."

"Yuh mean to arrest us?" asked Wheezer.

"That's what I mean to do."

"All right," grinned Chet. "We'll remember it."

Murtch clamped his jaws and looked them over. Here were three men who had no respect for him nor the law. He knew it would be useless to insist on them going

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back to Broken Butte with him; not only useless, but dangerous as well. But he was willing to try and bluff them.

"Yuh know what it means to resist an office?"

"Did somebody resist yuh, Murtch?" asked Wheezer.

Murtch studied them for a moment and tightened upon the lead rope.

"All right," he said meaningly. "I asked yuh to come with me and yuh refused, remember. Next time I want yuh I'll bring men enough to take yuh."

"Kind of a mass meetin', eh?" grinned Chet. "Mebbe we won't stay for yore party, sheriff."

"You'd be —— wise not to!" snapped Murtch as he turned and rode away, leading Hardy's horse.

The three cowboys watched him for several minutes, but he did not look back. Then they whirled their horses and went back toward the ranch.

"We'll pack what stuff we want and fade out," said Chet. "There's no use takin' any chances. If he once gets us behind the bars—*adios*."

"What about Leather?" asked Wheezer. "I ain't goin' to fog away without hearin' from him. If he was the one that nailed Clay Hardy he'll show up or send us word."

"What do you think, Wooden-shoe?" asked Chet.

"I been wonderin'. Ain't it kinda funny that the sheriff advised us to pull out of here? That ain't accordin' to my idea of what a sheriff ought to do. He can't hold us for what happened to Clay Hardy."

"If he does, he can," observed Chet. "And if they ever put the deadwood on us for all this rustlin'—whooee! Nawsir, I can't see myself waitin' for him to come out with a posse. Williams knows that we loaded this range with cattle, and I don't trust that jasper a-tall. Mebbe Leather had the right idea in tellin' him—I dunno."

THEY found Miss Cleveland on the porch of the ranch-house, and from her appearance, she had slept little. She was not the imperious lady of the day before, and seemed rather glad to see the three punchers.

"Howdy," greeted Wheezer, as they dismounted. "Nice morning, ain't it, ma'am."

"Yes, it—it's very nice. Did you just come from town?"

"Well, not quite from town, ma'am. Yuh see, a man got kinda shot up down there by the gate this mornin', and we had to take him in."

"A man got shot! Oh, I heard the shots! Who—how did it happen?"

"Some feller pulled the trigger," explained Wheezer. "Jist like blooie, blooie, blooie! Three times."

Wheezer held out his hand and went through the motions of pulling the trigger three times.

"But who was it?"

"Nobody you know, ma'am," said Chet. "One feller laid for the other one. Didn't amount to nothin.' "

"But I want to know who it was."

"The one that got shot was Clay Hardy, the deputy sheriff."

"Was—was he trying to make an arrest?"

"Prob'ly," said Wheezer dryly. "I wouldn't put anythin' past that sheriff's office."

The girl looked inquiringly at them and adjusted her tumbled hair.

"Did you see Mr. Williams this morning?" she asked.

"Old fish-eye?" Chet shook his head. "We're layin' for him, and I'll betcha he don't show up. Wonder when Ma is goin' to have breakfast ready."

"Oh!" Miss Cleveland looked curiously at him and frowned slightly. "Didn't you—er—Mrs. Coogan is not here. Mr. Williams took her to town last night."

"Oh, yeah."

Chet rubbed his chin and nodded slowly. Wheezer and Wooden-shoe squinted at each other and back at Miss Cleveland.

"Went to town, did she?" asked Wheezer. "That's funny."

"Mr. Williams took her," repeated the girl. "He said he would bring me another cook early this morning."

"Said he would," parroted Wheezer. "Whatcha know?"

"Ma'am," said Wooden-shoe, "I don't reckon you *sabe* about Ma Coogan. Mebbe folks has told yuh wrong."

"You lemme do the talkin,'" Wheezer interposed impatiently. "You don't want no Chinese cook. You——"

"Are you running this ranch?" asked Miss Cleveland, but her voice was a trifle weak, and she seemed to force herself to be stern.

Wheezer laughed softly and shook his head.

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"No, ma'am, I ain't. Yo're the owner and boss, but we know this here ranch better than you or that fish-eyed lawyer does. We seen that notice on the bunk-house door and we seen all our stuff piled outside.

"Thassall right. We ain't wailin' about that part of it. Ma's old, ma'am. This is her home. She's been here a long time, don'tcha know it. Mebbe you had a mother, and if yuh did, and if she was old like Ma, and——"

Wheezer stopped and scratched his head. He had about run out of words. Miss Cleveland bit her lip. She seemed very thoughtful, and the boys waited for her to speak.

"And Ma didn't have no money," said Chet softly.

"I—I'm sorry," said the girl. "I—oh, don't talk to me! I had to stay alone in that house all night and I never slept at all, and —— such a place!"

She whirled on her heel and fairly ran into the house, leaving the three cow-punchers gawping after her.

"She cusses jist like a human bein'," said Chet wonderingly. "She said, '—— such a place!' I betcha she's mad at the old NR."

They sat down on the steps and rolled smokes. There was no use in them staying at the ranch, and they knew of no place to go.

"We're in a —— of a fix," declared Wheezer.

"Wooden-shoe can cook," observed Chet. "If I could cook I'd go into the kitchen and cook."

"I ain't et nothin' since yesterday noon," complained Wheezer. "My insides are paralyzed from inaction."

"I wonder if she'd let me cook?" questioned Wooden-shoe.

"You try it and see." Miss Cleveland spoke from the doorway. "I had a can of corn for my dinner and I haven't had anything since. I don't know how to cook."

"Lemme at that kitchen," grinned Wooden-shoe. "I'm plum familiar with food. If the lawyer comes you tell him to tie his chink to the corral-fence, 'cause there's a horse-thief in the kitchen."

"Honest?" Miss Cleveland stared at him.

"Well, about as honest as a horse-thief ever gets," grinned Wooden-shoe, and jingled his spurs into the kitchen.

MURTCH lost no time in taking Clay Hardy to a doctor—old Doctor Chisholm, the only M. D. in Broken Butte. He was a tall, very severe old man, whose spectacles were forever threatening to slip off the end of his long nose.

He made a quick examination of Clay Hardy, who had never regained consciousness, and shook his head.

"Sher-r-riff, this is no job for a sur-r-r-geon. Ye are wantin' the coroner."

"Is he dead?" asked Murtch quickly.

"I ha' never seen a deader one, sir."

Murtch shook his head wearily.

"Well, you're the coroner, Doc."

"Aye. How did ye say he came by his wounds?"

"I didn't say," growled Murtch. "That —— gang from the NR outfit turned him over to me awhile ago. They told a fool story about some one shootin' Hardy at the ranch, but don't know who done it."

"Then the cir-r-rcumstances calls for an inquest?"

"I think he was murdered."

"Ha' ye any idea who would do it?"

"There's one of the NR outfit missin.' Name's Kleig."

"Weel—" the doctor adjusted his glasses and rubbed his nose thoughtfully—"weel, I suppose we may as well sit on the case in th' mor-rnin.' Ye will pr-r-roduce the necessary witnesses, sheriff?"

"I'll come —— near doin' it," growled Murtch, and went back to his horse.

He found Williams at his office, a bandage around his head and a frayed cigar clamped between his teeth. Murtch lost no time in telling Williams what had happened to Clay Hardy. For several moments Williams was incoherently explosive, but overcame his feelings enough to try and think calmly.

"What was that —— fool doin' out there, anyway?"

Murtch shook his head.

"How'd I know? I bawled him out for lettin' Kleig run that sandy on him, and he got mad about it. Mebbe he tried to salivate Kleig, I dunno."

"Went out after him, eh?"

Murtch nodded gloomily.

"Looks like it, Eph. Kleig is missing today—so the boys said, but I don't believe 'em. I'm gittin' cock-eyed over this thing, I tell yuh."

"You'll be lucky if you don't get worse than that."

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"Thasso?" Murtch flared for a moment, but cooled off quickly. "Mebbe yo're right, Eph. What in —— is the best thing to do?"

"Well—" Williams rubbed his sore head and smiled sourly—"my advice would be to throw Spade Hollister into jail on a murder charge, raise that one thousand nine hundred and twenty dollars for those four NR thieves and tell 'em to get to —— out of the Broken Butte country."

"Yuh would, eh?"

"Well, then you suggest something, Murtch."

"That ranch can't stand payin' that much money."

"You might take a mortgage on the ranch."

"Aw, ——! I wish somebody'd shot me before I ever heard of the NR. —— old Ralls! —— all his relations!"

"Go ahead and get it out of your system Murtch."

"All right; —— you along with the rest!"

Murtch got to his feet and stamped to the doorway. There was no doubt but what the sheriff of Broken Butte was both angry and disgusted. He leaned against the door-jamb and glared around.

Suddenly he leaned forward and looked intently toward the Broken Butte hotel. Then he turned and called to Williams—

"Come here!"

Williams joined him and together they watched Chet Wells help Ma Coogan into a buggy, behind which was tied Chet's saddle-horse, and drive out of town toward the NR ranch.

"What does that mean?" grunted Williams.

Murtch shrugged his shoulders.

"I s'pose it means that you ain't got a ——of a lot to say about the NR ranch, Eph."

Williams spat out his frayed cigar and looked gloomily after the departing buggy. Murtch squinted at Williams, as if enjoying the lawyer's bitterness.

"Well, what's the answer?" he asked.

"It won't suit you, Murtch, but it's the only solution that I can see. You are going to howl like a wolf, but it's got to be done. Come back into the office."

Murtch debated for a moment, after Williams had gone back to his desk, but followed him inside.

MISS CLEVELAND came out to the ranch-house doorway as Chet drove up to the porch with Ma Coogan. To the new owner of the NR it seemed as though fate was bound to keep Ma Coogan on that ranch. The old lady smiled up at her as Chet helped her out of the buggy.

"Sure, I'm glad and proud to be back," said Ma happily, "and I'm pleased that ye sent for me, miss."

"Oh—uh—yes," faltered the girl, looking hard at Chet, who turned and glanced toward the bunk-house, as if looking for the moral support of the other boys.

Miss Cleveland had not sent for Ma Coogan. Wooden-shoe's culinary efforts had not been appreciated.

"He means well," explained Wheezer, "but the food ain't noways sympathetic enough, ma'am."

And then Chet Wells had an inspiration.

"Ma'am, do you want to hire a good cook?" he asked.

"It appears that such a person is desired," she replied, and Chet had appointed himself to employ just such a person. Hence Ma Coogan's return.

Wheezer and Wooden-shoe came out of the barn, got a glimpse of Ma Coogan on the porch and came up on the run. Chet had not explained who he was going to hire.

Ma Coogan shook hands with them and beamed widely.

"Sure, the old ranch needed me," she laughed. "Chet tells me that Wooden-shoe set himself up as a cook."

Wooden-shoe patted her on the back and grinned widely.

"I plumb ruined the food to git yuh back," he explained. "I'm smart, I am."

"But not as smart as Chet," stated Wheezer, looking at Miss Cleveland.

Ma laughed and turned to the girl.

"God bless ye, miss. Ye dunno how much happiness it gives me to be back here. Sure, the world wasn't much for the old lady away from here. Ye can't understand. It's just home to me—and the children—" She smiled affectionately at the cowboys. "Ye are children, so ye are. I had four fine little boys when I went away, and I've four little boys and a little girl when I came back."

She threw one arm around Miss Cleveland and gave her a squeeze, before she went into the house. Wheezer lifted his

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shoulders in a sigh of relief. Miss Cleveland turned from watching Ma Coogan and looked straight into Wheezer's solemn eyes.

"Yuh ain't sorry she came back, are yuh, ma'am?" he asked softly.

"Sorry?" The girl stared at him unblinkingly for a moment and turned toward the door. "No, I'm not sorry—I—I think I'm glad."

"Then there's four glads around here," said Chet slowly. "Ma's a dinger, y'betcha."

She went into the house and in a few minutes they heard her talking to Ma Coogan.

"Yuh got more brains than I gave yuh credit for, Chet," said Wheezer. "I never figured yuh was thinkin' about bringin' Ma back here. What'll Williams say?"

"He's all through sayin' things about Ma," said Chet. "Me and that jasper is goin' to lock horns, if he comes out here again. I seen him and Murtch in Williams' office, and they was watchin' us leave."

"Didja hear anybody talkin' about Clay Hardy?" asked Wooden-shoe.

"Nope. I wasn't doin' no talkin'. Broken Butte didn't seem much stirred up about it."

It was possibly an hour later that Murtch and Williams rode up to the NR on horseback. The three cowboys met them at the door of the ranch-house, but there was no welcome in their greetings.

Williams smiled in a sickly way as he said:

"Well, I see that you brought the old lady back here. Good idea. Was thinking about it myself."

"With a reverse English," nodded Wheezer seriously.

"Not at all."

Williams smiled and shook his head, as he glanced around. Then—

"Where is Mr. Kleig?"

"My ——!" grunted Chet. "Mister Kleig!"

"We dunno where he is," replied Wooden-shoe.

"I see," nodded Williams meaningly. "Perhaps you might be able to find him later. At any rate—" He drew a bulky package from his pocket and opened it—"I have drawn one thousand nine hundred and twenty dollars against the NR estate to be paid to you four men for services rendered. I shall have to entrust you with four hundred and eighty of it for Mr. Kleig."

Wheezer started to cuff his hat to one side of his head, but the blow sent the sombrero spinning off the porch. Wooden-shoe sagged at the waist and his hand went uncertainly to his mouth; while Chet merely kicked himself on the ankle with his spurred heel.

Murtch tried to smile, but it faded quickly.

"Your year's salary," said Murtch thickly, and then seemed to have difficulty clearing his throat.

"Yeah—year's salary," parroted Wheezer foolishly, as he watched Williams separate the four payments.

"I have talked it over with Miss Cleveland," said Williams, handing them each the money and giving Leather's share to Wheezer, "and we decided to meet your claims. Perhaps it is hardly legal, but, under the circumstances, and out of the goodness of her heart, she decided to do this."

"All I can say is 'hurrah for our side!' " grunted Wooden-shoe. "My gosh!"

He looked down at the money and his nose fairly quivered.

"Have you any plans?" asked Williams.

"Plans?" Chet looked up quickly. "My ——, yuh don't need plans when you've got a year's salary in yore hand."

"I'll take her as she comes," declared Wheezer, trying to be serious.

"You will be leaving this range soon?" Williams tone was suggestive as well as interrogatory.

"Mebbe," nodded Wheezer. "Yuh can't sometimes always tell."

"I had an idea that you'd leave as soon as you got that money."

"Yeah?" Chet pocketed his money and grinned widely. "Cowboys, lemme at that old roulette. I'm goin' hawg wild and bull strong."

"I've got the good system," offered Wooden-shoe. "All yuh got to do——"

Murtch snorted disgustedly, and Wooden-shoe stopped.

"What's a matter with you?" he demanded. "Ain't a feller got a right to have a system?"

"Didja find out who shot Hardy?" asked Wheezer, who wanted to promote peace.

"Naw!" snarled Murtch. "But I'm goin' to, by ——! And when I do, he'll hang!"

"I betcha," nodded Wheezer. "You won't even wait for judge nor jury, Murtch. Right now yo're mad at something, ain'tcha? You've got a terrible disposition."

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Murtch snorted something unintelligible and stamped back to his horse, but Williams went into the house, where he engaged in conversation with Miss Cleveland. The three cowboys sat down on the steps and looked at each other queerly.

It was more money than they had ever had—all at one time. They were not entitled to it, that much was sure.

"I wonder if they're goin' to give Ma some money," said Wheezer softly. "I betcha that girl has done felt sorry for what she done. I hate to take her money."

"So do I," nodded Chet. "Mebbe I'll pay it back to her some day—mebbe."

Williams came out and hesitated for a moment before he told them of the inquest.

"I suppose you boys will have to be there to tell what you know about it."

"Yeah," agreed Chet. "We'll come early. Fact is, I reckon we'll start pretty soon. Yuh goin' to have Miss Cleveland? She heard the shots fired."

Williams frowned slightly, but went back into the house for a few minutes. When he came out he told them that Miss Cleveland would attend the inquest.

"It will be a good chance for her to meet some of the Broken Butte folks," he added, and went to his horse.

Murtch did not speak to him, and they rode silently away from the ranch.

WILLIAMS and Murtch had hardly reached Broken Butte before Wheezer, Chet and Wooden-shoe came in sight of town. Their future was a pink haze of riotous living and their horses' legs were not swift enough. They pounded into town, barely took time to stable their horses and headed for the Shoshone.

They were questioned regarding the shooting of Clay Hardy, which, under ordinary circumstances, would have given them food for much conversation and argument, but with four hundred and eighty dollars apiece—they were tongue-tied.

Battler Morgan grinned widely and pointed at the ceiling, which meant that there was no limit. Murtch looked into the Shoshone, groaned bitterly, spat viciously and went away. Wheezer had put Leather's money into his boot, rather than to entrust it to any one.

It was nearly daylight the next morning when Chet and Wooden-shoe bumped into each other at the doorway, as they were both going out.

"Whazza matter?" asked Chet owlishly. "Doorsh too li'l f'r you, par'ner?"

"Thaz' ri'," clucked Wooden-shoe, hanging to a porch-post, which seemed to sway him about. "Whazza m'r with you, eh? Shame y'shelf?"

"Broke," dismally. "Money all gone and shomebody stole m' rudder. Can't steer m'shelf."

"Ep'demic," hiccoughed Wooden-shoe. "Ter'ble ep'demic. Awful losh of life. Blew m' shubstanch in ri'tous livin'. Whazza use?"

"Poor li' girl," wailed Chet, suddenly becoming remorseful. "Lied her out of for'shun. Shame m'shelf, y'betcha. Poo-o-or li'l girl."

"Thash ri'," sobbed Wooden-shoe, getting into the spirit of the occasion. "Poo-o-o-or li'l girl. Oh, my gosh! Poo-o-o-or li'l thing!"

And together they sobbed tearfully, remorsefully, trying to pat each other on the back at a distance of eight feet apart.

The cool air revived them somewhat and after a time they quit crying and became dignified. There was a lighted lamp in Williams' office. Chet's eyes focused upon it.

"Wooden-shoe," he said seriously, "our lawyer is indushtrious. Works night 'n day. Let's go and shee him. What yuh shay? Mebbe we can think of shomethin' he ain't paid for, eh?"

"Sh-sure," stuttered Wooden-shoe. "Never can tell. We've had a nice night f'r thish time of the year. You go 'head, Chet, 'cause you know the way acrosh better'n I do."

They started out in single-file, but cross-currents interfered, and at times they were fifty feet apart.

They finally reached the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street, but below Williams' office.

"Mus' 'a' been cloud-bursht," observed Wooden-shoe. "Never sheen the river so swift before. Mus' 'a' had to git off and swim, don'tcha know it. I'm all wet."

" 'S'nawful current right here," admitted Chet thickly. "C'mon."

They started up the street, bumping into the wooden sidewalk at intervals, but managed to reach the corner of Williams' office.

Wooden-shoe began to laugh hoarsely.

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" 'S'all right, Chet. I thought I fell in river, but 's only a bottle of hooch busted in m' hip-pocket."

Chet slid across the sidewalk and peered into the office window. Williams was there, sitting at his desk, and just in from of the desk stood a man, with his back toward the window. Wooden-shoe crawled over and peered into the window.

Williams was hunched back in his chair, saying nothing, but the other man was tensed forward, talking rapidly. As Chet's eyes began to focus properly he saw Murtch leaning against the wall, partly in the shadow, and about six feet from the man who was talking.

The conversation was pitched too low for Chet or Wooden-shoe to hear what was being said, but they knew that it was a heated argument. Neither of the cowboys were eavesdroppers; so they crawled to the corner, dropped their feet over the edge of the high sidewalk and sat with their backs to the street.

"Whozat arguin' in there?" asked Wooden-shoe.

"Tha's Hollister, the crooked gambler."

"Zasso? I wonder——"

Came the thud of a muffled shot, and the corner of the building, against which Chet was leaning his shoulder, jarred slightly. At the same instant the lamp went out.

Chet and Wooden-shoe promptly fell off the sidewalk and landed on their hands and knees.

"Sh-h-h!" cautioned Chet, as they turned around and poked their heads above the sidewalk. There was not a sound for a minute or so; and then a door closed softly. It sounded like it might be the rear door of Williams' office.

Then the front door opened and Williams came out. He lighted a cigar, surveyed the street for a few moments and walked slowly away.

"Whatcha think?" queried Wooden-shoe, poking his head above the level of the sidewalk.

"Yes," grunted Chet enigmatically. "Let's go down to the livery-stable and find a shoft place to sleep."

"But what was the shootin' about?" persisted Wooden-shoe. "There was a shot fired in there as sure as——"

"Tha's none of my business—in my condition," declared Chet. "C'mon and sleep it off."

THE inquest had been fairly well advertised by word of mouth, and quite a crowd gathered in Broken Butte. Clay Hardy was not popular. Had he been killed in an open fight, or if his slayer was known, there would have been little interest shown. But there was an element of mystery, which always appeals.

Williams had sent a man out to the NR ranch after Miss Cleveland, and he had brought Ma Coogan along. The inquest was to be held in Williams' office, which was hardly large enough to accomodate a crowd.

Chairs had been brought from the Shoshone Saloon and placed in orderly rows. Doctor Chisholm, with the able assistance of "Judge" Myers, a justice of the peace, conducted the inquest.

Chet and Wooden-shoe slept late in the hay-loft of the livery-stable, and were hardly in physical shape to enjoy the proceedings. Wheezer had not slept, but his winnings amounted to seven hundred dollars and he was vocally jubilant.

The three of them managed to worm themselves to a point of vantage near the middle of the room, in spite of Murtch trying to keep them back. It was hot in that packed room, and the three cowboys wished that they were outside.

"Slim" Carey, proprietor of the stage-office, Gus Welch, a restaurant keeper, Buck Harmon, owner of the Box-H, "Peevee" Sorenson, blacksmith, Jud Reeves, owner of the livery-stable and King Cole, were chosen as a coroner's jury.

Wheezer Bell was the first witness, and he perspired copiously over his explanation of what happened at the gateway of the NR ranch. Murtch asked him where Leather Kleig was at that time, but Wheezer did not know.

Murtch testified as to how he had taken possession of Clay Hardy's body, and that the three cowboys had stated that Clay had tried to bushwhack some one.

"The bullet holes r-r-ranged downward," stated Doctor Chisholm, indicating the angle with a poke of a forefinger. "He was shot fr-r-rom above."

"Didn't he have trouble with Kleig?" questioned Buck Harmon.

"Hol' on!" snapped Chet. "If Leather had killed Hardy he wouldn't 'a' run away, y'betcha."

"You're not a witness, Wells," advised Murtch.

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"The —— I'm not!"

"Order!" yelped the judge, hammering on the desk. "One more remark like that and out you go."

"Gimme a chance and I'll go before that," retorted Chet. "This danged place would cook a ham."

"He had trouble with Kleig," said Murtch, ignoring Chet and speaking to Harmon. "Kleig shoved a gun in his ribs——"

"Sa-a-ay!" interrupted Wheezer. "Where's the jasper that Clay was framin' to shoot in that poker game?"

Murtch turned and spoke to the judge, who shook his head quickly. Murtch turned back, saying—

"Kleig disappeared that night and——"

"I asked a lady-like question and can't git no answer," wailed Wheezer. "Where's that gambler?"

The judge rapped sharply again and glared at Wheezer.

"I told you once that I'd put——"

"Try doin' it," invited Wheezer. "I want to know where that gambler is. He's the jasper that knows."

"Do we have to suffer all these interruptions from three drunken cowpunchers?" asked Williams angrily.

"Who's drunk?" demanded Wooden-shoe, and started to get up, but Wheezer drew him back.

"Ar-r-re we goin' to make this a place of hecklin' and blatherin', or do we pr-r-roceed with the inquest?" burred the doctor impatiently.

"Are we sure that this shootin' was done at the NR ranch?" asked Slim Carey. Slim was very slow in his speech, which was partly muffled by a huge chew of tobacco.

"Miss Cleveland heard the shots," offered Williams.

Miss Cleveland nodded quickly and waited for him to question her, but the jury seemed to take it as conclusive evidence. Every one in the room endeavored to catch a glimpse of the new ranch-owner.

"Miss Jane Cleveland inherited the NR ranch from her uncle, Nick Ralls," explained Williams.

There was a shuffling of feet and several talked in undertones. Suddenly a man came worming his way through the crowd. It was a cowboy from the Box-H, and he was excited, as he called to Murtch.

"Sheriff, I found a dead man down in Cannon-ball Gulch! He's been shot and looks like he'd been dumped over the edge."

Cannon-ball Gulch paralleled the stage-road, and was only about a mile from Broken Butte.

"Who was he, Bud?" asked Harmon.

"I dunno him. Looks like a gambler t' me."

"That's the feller!" exclaimed Wheezer. "Name's Hollister, or somethin' like that."

Miss Cleveland had got to her feet and was staring at Wheezer, while she grasped the back of the chair in front of her. The place was momentarily in an uproar.

"That's the feller that Hardy had the trouble with!" yelped Wheezer. "I'll betcha——"

"Don't you go to bettin' too much!" rasped Murtch, half-yelling his words.

"Order!" yelled the judge. "Set down and shut up!"

Miss Cleveland ignored every one and forced her way to Wheezer.

"Say that name again," she panted. "Was it Hollister?"

"Yeah—they called him Spade, ma'am."

"Spade Hollister!"

The girl gasped out the name and stared at Williams. He had heard her, and his cheeks went pale. His fishy eyes shifted quickly to Murtch. There was so much conversation that only those vitally interested were paying any attention to the girl.

The cowboy was explaining to those around him how he had accidently run across the body. It was not in a place where it would be easily discovered. Chet got to his feet and put a hand on the girl's arm, as he looked at Murtch and Williams.

"Say, do yuh want me to tell yuh who killed that Hollister?"

Murtch jerked back, as if afraid, but hunched forward again, staring at Chet. Williams grasped Murtch by the arm, trying to gain his attention, but Murtch was waiting for Chet to speak again.

"What do you know about that murder?" asked Jud Reeves.

BUT before Chet could tell what he knew, there came a mutter of voices, the shifting of feet, and in through the crowd came Leather Kleig and a young woman. She was a stranger to Broken Butte.

Kleig was grinning. He stopped near the center of the room and glanced around.

"Heard somebody say that I got here

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just in time," Leather smiled widely. Murtch and Williams were staring at him. He turned and looked at Miss Cleveland, whose face was white.

"I reckon I got here in time," continued Leather. "I didn't know that Clay Hardy was dead. Yuh see—" He glanced around the room—"I had an idea that even a lawyer can make mistakes. Mister Williams I'd like to have yuh meet Miss Jane Cleveland, the new owner of the NR ranch."

Leather indicated the girl with him, and a gasp of surprize went up from the crowd.

"What do you mean, Kleig?" Williams' voice was hoarse with anger and fear.

"What do I mean?"

Leather leaned forward. His smile was gone now, and the lines about his eyes were drawn tightly.

"I mean that you picked the wrong girl, Williams. You helped the old man make out his will, and you saw a chance to steal the ranch; so you picked the wrong heiress. Murtch was in on the deal."

"That's a lie!" Murtch fairly screamed his denial.

Leather turned to Miss Cleveland—

"Did you know Spade Hollister?"

The room fell silent. For a moment she stared straight ahead, and then—

"Yes. Spade Hollister was my sweetheart."

"And, by ——, Murtch and Williams killed him!" yelled Chet. "I seen 'em together, and me and Wooden-shoe heard the shot!"

"Murtch killed him!" screamed Williams, "I——"

Williams' confession, or accusation, was cut short. Murtch had whirled sidewise and fired his six-shooter so close to Williams' side that the report was only a jarring thud.

As Williams fell, Murtch whirled on the crowd like a cornered wolf, but Leather's gun was spouting lead into him and he went down cursing thickly.

"Good boy!" yelled King Cole. "He'd 'a' killed like a coyote with the rabies. God! What a mess!"

The room was in an uproar. Doctor Chisholm lifted Williams' head and Leather crowded in close. Williams was conscious, but evidently knew that he was passing fast. He sneered at Leather and spat a curse.

"Open my safe," he croaked to the doctor. "Key's in my pocket. Quick."

The doctor took out the key and opened the safe.

"The package with the rubber band," croaked Williams.

He slipped the band loose and peered at the papers wonderingly. What he looked for was not there.

"Look in the safe!" he panted. "Find—paper."

"She's plumb empty, Williams," said the judge.

"Empty?" Williams nodded weakly and peered up at Leather. "I guess you win, Kleig. I might as well tell it all. Miss Cleveland is a honkatonk actress and we got her to play this part.

"Hollister was stuck on her, —— him! He found out something and came here to ask for his share and to see that she wasn't harmed. I guess he killed Clay Hardy. He demanded five thousand dollars, or would tell that it was a crooked deal. Murtch shot him.

"Murtch had Clay frame it to kill Hollister in that poker game, but you spoiled that. We were going to buy the NR from—her—for—one—dollar."

Williams laughed chokingly.

"You know what ruined our scheme, Kleig. Too—many—crooks."

He rolled sidewise and his head pillowed on his arm.

"It's a good thing we ain't got nothin' to arrest," said Wooden-shoe foolishly. "We ain't got no sheriff nor lawyer. What do yuh reckon he was lookin' for in the safe?"

"I'll take char-r-rge now," said the doctor wearily. "And I per-r-rsume there won't be any inquest."

The crowd moved back to the street. Ma Coogan was trying to "mother" Miss Cleveland, or rather the one who had been Miss Cleveland, and get acquainted with the real Miss Cleveland at the same time.

Leather Kleig drew King Cole aside and they walked down the street together, while the other three cowboys went to the livery-stable to arrange transportation back to the ranch for the women. When King Cole and Leather came back, the two-seated spring-wagon had drawn up to the sidewalk, with Chet driving.

Leather motioned to him to get down, and then spoke directly to the new owner of the NR.

"Like I told yuh before, ma'am, the

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ranch ain't nothin' for a lady to run. Mister Cole kinda wants to buy the place, as soon as the papers can be fixed up, and he offers a good price.

"Yuh better just stay here at the hotel until it is all fixed up, which will take a week or so. Ma will stay with yuh, of course."

He turned and put a hand on Ma's shoulder.

"Yo're fixed for life, Ma. Miss Cleveland insists that yuh take the money from the sale of the ranch and live easy the rest of yore life."

"But—but—" spluttered Ma Coogan, bewildered.

"That is true," replied the young lady. "I feel that it should belong to you."

"Hurrah f'r our side!" blurted Wooden-shoe.

"Sure, and what will become of you boys?" asked Ma Coogan anxiously. "Isn't there money enough——"

"We've got jobs down in the lower end of the valley," assured Leather, "and we'll see yuh once in a while."

IT WAS two hours later that the four cowboys rode away from the NR ranch. They had gone back to get their belongings, and each man had a bulging war-sack tied behind the cantle of his saddle.

"Now will yuh tell us where we're goin'?" asked Wheezer, as they halted at the top of a hog-back ridge and looked back at the old ranch-house.

Leather laughed softly and looped one leg around his saddle-horn while he rolled a cigaret.

"I was suspicious of Williams," he said slowly. "He was too —— interested, don'tcha know it? They wanted all of us off the place. I smelled a crooked deal.

"Then when they tried to kill Hollister, I knowed he was mixed up in it. Well, I wasn't so danged sure about any will bein' made out, so I out-smarted old Williams, knocked him on the head, opened his safe and put the key back in his pocket.

"That will was what he was lookin' for in that bundle of papers. I dunno what he ever saved it for, 'cause that was what cinched the deadwood on to him. I slipped out of town and headed for Keogh. I didn't know what luck I was goin' to have, but——"

"Hold on," interrupted Wheezer. "Do yuh mean to say that yuh got the will that old Nick made out?"

"Yeah—sure." Leather scratched a match and lighted his cigaret. "Their will was a forgery."

"Then why didn't yuh jist show the will and——"

"Nope," Leather inhaled deeply and shook his head. "I'll show yuh why." He took a legal-looking document from inside his shirt and opened it.

"This is the will that Ma Coogan witnessed. It gives the whole —— NR ranch to us four fellers."

"To us!" blurted Chet. "Whatcha mean?"

"That's what the will says, Chet. Us four fellers owned every danged stick and stone on the NR."

"Well, but—goshdang it, talk can't yuh?" croaked Wooden-shoe. "Where does this Miss Cleveland come in?"

"Her name wasn't Cleveland—not mine wasn't. Her name was Hollister once. Spade Hollister was her husband. He mistreated her awful, and I danged near killed him for it. Now, she's married to a good feller and they're doin' fine. She's my sister."

"Oh, my gosh!" exploded Wheezer. "And you got her to—I getcha, Leather."

"Yeah," nodded Leather. "I knowed how yuh all felt about Ma Coogan, and that's the only way I could figure to fix her up for life. And her money'll be clean, too.

"I told the whole thing to King Cole, and gave him a list of what we stole for the NR. He's goin' to tell these different outfits and see that they take back their stock and keep still about it.

"And he's goin' to pay Ma a good price for the NR and what honestly belongs there. My sister will see that it is all done on the level."

Leather grinned softly and touched a match to the document as he said—

"Ma wouldn't touch a crooked nickle, but she don't have to now."

"Where's the jobs yuh spoke about, Leather?" queried Wheezer.

"Somewhere," smiled Leather. "There ought to be jobs for honest and capable cowpunchers somewhere, hadn't there?"

Wheezer nodded solemnly, as he said:

"Y'betcha, cowboy. I take back what I've said about old Nick Ralls. He meant

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to shoot square, but he never figured Ma in on the game; so we'll jist call it a misdeal."

Leather nodded as he pinched out the fire on the remaining corner of the will and crumpled it into a tiny ball, which he tossed aside.

Then, as if by mutual consent, they turned from looking at the old ranch-house and rode out of sight over the hog-back.

The BITTER EGG-PLANT

by H. A. NOUREDDIN ADDIS

Author of "The Sword of Kara," "Mahmoud."

OLD RIZA BEY and his wife, Gul Hatoun, sat silent in the smoky, earth-floored common-room of their stone cabin. It was the evening after the burial of their eldest son, Hassan Bey. The old Kurd perched uncomfortably upon the hard, cushionless seat of the bench that encircled the room as if there had been some peculiar virtue in discomfort, while his wife sat before him upon a heap of cushions.

Now and again a sob would burst uncontrolled from the bereaved mother, and old Riza's hand would go out to touch her shoulder in soothing caress.

"Grieve not, O my soul," he would repeat parrot-like in hard, unnatural tones. "Does not the glorious Book say—

"Every soul is to taste the death; then unto us shall ye be returned?"

In response old Gul Hatoun would shudder without speaking. Her grief was too poignant for words. Her stalwart elder son, so good, so intelligent, was gone forever—he had passed into the Mercy of Allah. And it had been his very goodness, his compassion and tenderness of heart, that had been the indirect cause of his death. He had rescued some younger boys who had lost their way and become snow-bound in the mountains near by.

And of these boys, although they had suffered greatly from exposure, not one but was now out of danger; while their brave rescuer, Hassan Bey, had contracted the pneumonia which resulted in his death.

"May Allah admit him to His Mercy!"

Suddenly the outer door burst open, and a youth entered. He was tall, dark and of a boyish slenderness, although his figure gave promise of the great size and strength so usual to the Kurdish race.

"Father—mother!" he cried, his eyes furtively seeking out every obscure corner of the room. "Has Shems-ed-Din Agha, *chawush* of the Osmanli gendarmes, been here?"

The old man made a negative gesture.

"I have seen no Turks, thanks be to Allah," he replied. "Where hast thou been, son?"

"In the mountains. But," turning to Gul Hatoun, "why art thou so silent, O my mother? Hassan is not——"

The upraised finger of old Riza Bey

"The Bitter Egg-Plant," copyright, 1923, by H. A. Noureddin Addis.

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stopped him before he could complete the sentence.

"Thy brother—has passed into Allah's Mercy."

"Hassan dead?" cried the young man and fell to his knees in his grief at the sudden revelation. "O my brother Hassan!" he cried. "My beautiful, my darling, my beloved brother! O Allah, the Merciful, the Beneficent—why should he be taken?"

"It is the will of Allah, O Rahmet," said his father sternly.

"He is the living and the fountain-head of all life; there is no God but Him."

As Riza Bey finished the quotation a loud, peremptory rap sounded at the door.

"Is Rahmet Bey, son of Riza Bey, within?" came imperatively in Turkish.

"He is. Who asks?"

"Shems-ed-Din Agha, of the Ottoman gendarmerie."

The old man opened the door and peered cautiously into the gathering gloom.

"Rahmet Bey," went on the Turk as the opening door brought the younger Kurd into view, "thou art accused of an attempted robbery and murder upon old Ohan Aramian. Wilt go with me quietly?"

The boy's eyes flashed.

"I will go with thee," he replied gently as he stepped outside the door, where he was instantly taken in charge by the followers of Shem-ed-Din Agha.

"Deal mercifully with him," entreated the old man softly of the Turkish officer. "Wayward though he is, Rahmet is all that is left us now. I am an old man, and the finger of God has touched this house but recently, *efendim*. My eldest son has passed into the Mercy of Allah."

"Thy bereavement has been made known to me," replied the Turk more kindly, "and I pray that Allah may lighten thy burden. The entire village unites in praising thy deceased son, who was already an honor to thee—but with thy younger son, Rahmet Bey, the tale is otherwise, and being so he will no doubt escape the punishment that is his due. Doubtless thou knowest our ancient Turkish proverb, '*Aji patlijan kireghi chalmaz**.'"

The Kurd stared resentfully at the speaker, but when the gendarmes had gone and he had resumed his comfortless seat upon the hard plank, his wife observed him shake his head doubtfully as he muttered the Turkish words—

"*Aji patlijan kireghi chalmaz.*"

OHAN ARAMIAN, the Armenian farmer, lifted his bandaged head and stared hard at the prisoner. Then the light of recognition came into his eyes, and he smiled at the young Kurd.

"No, Shems-ed-Din Agha," he said to the Turkish officer, speaking with difficulty because of his injuries, "this boy is innocent. Rahmet Bey, son of Riza Bey, is my friend. A good boy."

And the old Armenian painfully extended a hand and clasped that of the young Kurd.

The Turk was plainly disappointed. His eyes narrowed as he gazed from one to the other, and his innate racial suspicions began to stir up doubts of both Kurd and Armenian.

"Who then are the guilty ones, O Armenian?" he demanded hotly. "Canst name them?"

Old Ohan waved a feeble hand.

"It was but a band of boys—children," he replied. "I attacked them first, and was perhaps more to blame than they."

"But they would have stolen your sheep," insisted the officer.

"A boy's game, Shems-ed-Din Agha," returned the Armenian. "I'm sorry that you have been caused needless trouble, but I can make no accusations—least of all against my friend Rahmet Bey, who I know is innocent."

"ALLAH is my witness, I had the donkey honestly by purchase."

Some familiar strain in the quavering old voice awoke a train of recollections in the mind of the young Kurdish *zabtiyye*, Rahmet Bey. He arose from a sitting posture beside the sun-lit wall of the ancient *Karakol-khane*, and approached the door.

The slight, boyish figure has taken on more heroic proportions, the chin is somewhat squarer and more resolute, and the budding mustache is now well grown, but the true if somewhat roguish expression of the deep brown eyes is the same in the young Kurdish chief who is rendering his military obligations to the Ottoman Empire in rural police service as in the youth who a few years earlier so narrowly escaped falling into the toils of that same police system.

* It is never the *bitter* egg-plant that the frost attacks.

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"Strange," rejoined the sneering tones of A'asim Agha, the Circassian chieftain, "the animal was stolen from my herd but three days since."

"Three golden liras was the price I paid," went on the strangely familiar old voice as Rahmet Bey struggled upon the edge of the crowd for a glimpse of the speaker. "I had him of two strangers, Circassians by their dress, whom I met upon the road. Allah is my witness."

The onlookers, mainly Circassian tribesmen of the district, with here and there a uniformed *Zabtiyye* off duty, had thronged to the *Karakol-khane*, to hear the accusation of their chief against the Armenian robber whom he had caught that morning in possession of the donkey in question.

Intent as he was upon learning the identity of the possessor of that haunting voice, the Kurdish gendarme still did not fail to note the meaning glances that passed from one to another of the Circassian tribesmen at mention of the three golden liras. Then, suddenly, the crowd parted, opening a line by which he was able to enter the building.

"Ohan Aramian!" he cried.

Then, turning to his commander before whom the Circassian was making his accusation against the old Armenian—

"Ohan Aramian is not a bandit, Excellency," he protested.

The Turkish officer smiled indulgently.

"What knowest thou of the accused, Rahmet?"

"We are old friends," replied the Kurd, "this Armenian and I. Since my childhood we have lived as neighbors in the Kurdish mountains, and I know Ohan Aramian as I know my own people."

The great Circassian chief, A'asim Bey, laughed.

"Armenian and Kurd," he sneered, "yes, they know one another back there in the Kurdish mountains, that I doubt not. Also they know where graze the flocks and herds of many an honest man."

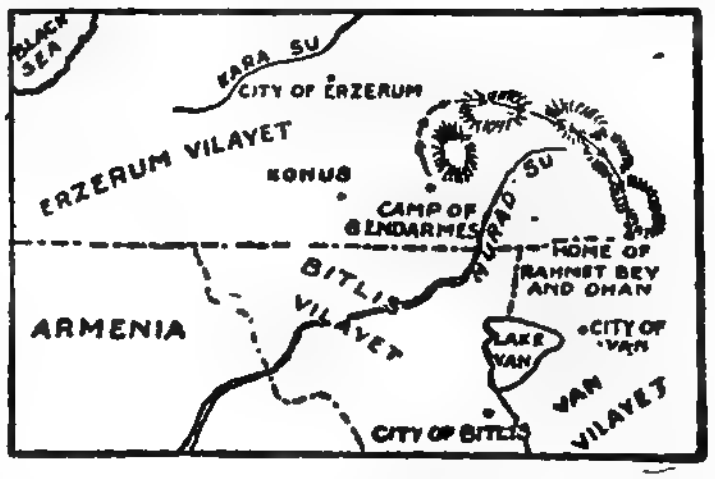
Again the Turk could not restrain a smile. The Circassian chief had too nearly voiced the prevailing sentiment of those who dwelt in the lowlands bordering the mountains of Kurdistan. Nor was the Circassian record less dark, but smirched with villainies of a different sort.

"Thou art certain of this man's reputation in his own country—of his honesty, Rahmet?"

"Vallahi!"

"Now, by Allah!" roared the Circassian chief. "Were I the accused I can imagine no greater hardship than that my honesty should be acclaimed by a Kurd."

"The Armenian shall be held awaiting further evidence," was the final decision of Teyyib Yuz-bashi, commander of the gendarmes. At this the Circassians rode off grumbling in the direction of their village,



Ak-Dere, but their chief did not depart until after being closeted for some minutes with the Turkish officer.

"Thou art off duty today, Kurd," exclaimed a Turkish *Zabtiyye* as he observed Rahmet Bey in the act of saddling his horse, immediately the Circassians had gone. "Hast forgotten?"

"No," replied the Kurd, "I have not forgotten. But Yildirim needs exercise. He is so restless that I find him difficult to control when he has passed a day without the saddle."

And he stroked the glistening coat of the spirited horse.

A SHORT time later Rahmet Bey rode out of camp in the direction taken by the Circassian tribesmen. For some distance he followed the main caravan-road to Ak-Dere, then, assuring himself that he was not observed, turned off at right-angles, and followed a little ravine which abruptly lost itself among the low hills. Soon he came to a cabin tenanted by a Kurd. Rahmet dismounted and led his horse into a low stable adjoining the cabin, where after a moment's conversation the tenant of the place joined him with a bundle of clothing. There he exchanged his gendarme's uniform for the gorgeously ornamented habiliments of a Circassian, changing his horse's trappings as well—

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saddle, bridle, everything—even to the well-worn saddle-pads.

Thus outfitted he galloped away and was gone for three or four hours. Upon his return he changed back into his discarded gendarme's uniform, and, once more the alert *Zabtiyye*, rode swiftly back down the ravine.

As he neared the road a passing horseman came into view riding rapidly. Rahmet reined Yildirim in where he would be screened from view behind a dense thicket, and, a moment later, recognized the horseman as a Kurdish *Zabtiyye* belonging to his company.

The company boasted seven Kurdish members; five upon whom he felt that he could rely absolutely, and himself; the other had received certain preferment at the hands of the Turks, and had gone over to them body and soul. Rahmet Bey gave thanks to Allah that this was one of the former as he urged his horse in pursuit of the galloping gendarme.

"Canst give me news of the outcome of the Circassian's accusation against the Armenian?" demanded the other when they were riding side by side.

Rahmet gave the Kurd a brief resumé of the inquiry, dwelling at some length upon his own part in the affair.

"The *yuz-bashi* thought the evidence sufficent to warrant his holding old Ohan," he concluded glumly. "What thinkest thou, Abbas?"

"By Allah, I think that thy sponsorship should have carried more weight than all the lying testimony of these Circassians. I doubt not that it came about as the Armenian said and that he purchased the donkey—perhaps from the agents of A'asim Bey himself."

DURING the ride back to camp Rahmet Bey told his companion of his boyhood experiences with old Ohan Aramian. This story aroused the Kurd, especially that part dealing with old Ohan's friendly relations with his Kurdish neighbors.

"My suspicions were aroused," went on Rahmet Bey, "and for that reason I visited their chief village this afternoon, mingling with the Circassians as one of their own race. There I was able to confirm my idea that their native cupidity had been aroused by the fact that the Armenian had paid for the donkey with gold. I find that in the minds of the Circassians those three golden liras are evidence of a vast hoard of gold."

"We Kurds must see that the Armenian gets justice!" cried Abbas.

Rahmet Bey smiled.

"Justice," he repeated thoughtfully. "Hadst thou seen the look upon our captain's face during the Circassian's accusation, thou wouldst not speak of justice."

"Thinkest thou, then, that our commander is not an honest man?"

Rahmet Bey made a negative sign.

"Not just that," he replied. "But A'asim Bey is a wealthy and influential man, and A'asim Bey desires the Armenian's punishment."

"Perhaps thou art oversuspicious," ventured Abbas.

"Perhaps," retorted Rahmet with a shrug. "Yet I heard it whispered in the Circassian village that Teyyib Yuz-bashi is to place none but Circassian guards over the Armenian tonight."

THE district was undergoing a period of comparative tranquillity. As the evening wore on three small patrols of picked men were sent out, chiefly because the Ottoman Gendarmerie must do something to justify its existence, ostensibly to guard against further depredations on the part of roving bandits.

It happened that none of the Kurds were included in these bands, which augured well to Rahmet Bey, especially when later on, it transpired that the *Zabtiyyes* chosen for guard duty were Circassians to a man.

It was well past midnight when the sleeping gendarmes were aroused by the cries of the Circassians on guard. Torches and lanterns flickered as they hurried to and fro, waking their sleeping comrades, peering into every corner, and recounting how a band of horsemen—doubtless Armenian bandits—had descended upon them and forcibly taken Ohan Aramian from the guard-house.

Rahmet Bey placed his hand inside the Armenian's bunk. It was cold.

"He has been gone some time," he whispered to Abbas who was at his side. "It was as I suspected, the Circassians. These guards are without a scratch."

"I have passed the word to our Kurds," returned the other. "They are outside with the horses. Shall we follow?"

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Silently they made their way outside. There in the shadow of the trees their countrymen awaited them.

Riding out into the moonlight the Kurds heard the captain's voice ordering them to halt.

"Forward!" commanded Rahmet Bey.

"Halt, in Allah's name!" persisted the Turkish commander, then, as they gave no sign of obeying, he turned to the other gendarmes. "Follow these rebel Kurds and kill or take them prisoner," he cried. "Quick!"

But while the others were saddling and making other preparations for following their mutinous comrades, the little band of Kurds were urging their horses in the direction of the village of Ak-Dere.

As they approached the village certain signs told the Kurds that they had done well to follow their instincts. The whole Circassian camp was astir. A short distance away a fire glimmered, revealing a great mass of people in motion.

Fortunately for the purpose of the rescue party the Circassians had either felt so sure of their safety that they had stationed no guards about the village, or the guards, their cupidity uppermost, had abandoned their posts. At any rate the Kurds rode unchallenged to the very edge of the crowd that milled and surged about the fire.

At last through the changing crowd they were able to make out the form of the old Armenian stretched upon the earth beside the fire. The old man had evidently undergone some torture, but was by no means disabled, as that would have defeated the purposes of his tormentors. As he lay now, staked out and securely bound, a large Circassian approached with a heavy stick and took his place at the old man's feet, ready to administer the bastinado when the time came.

Meanwhile the word *altyn*—gold—came distinctly to the ears of the Kurds. Their suspicions had been correct; the old Armenian was being tortured, not because he was suspected of brigandage, but because he had mentioned paying for the donkey in golden liras.

At Rahmet Bey's whispered word of command the Kurds spurred their horses into the mob. They had little time to waste. They knew they were followed by the Turkish gendarmes. The unruly Circassians, falling back at sight of the well-known uniforms, still grumbled threateningly as the Kurds ordered them to release old Ohan.

The giant holding the cudgel, who had taken the lead in torturing the old man, with the bully's cowardice, knelt in a panic and began loosening the latter's bonds. For an instant there was absolute quiet throughout the crowd, and in that instant the sound of the hoofs of galloping horses faintly reached the ears of Rahmet Bey.

"The Turks!" he cried softly in Kurdish to his companions. "We must hurry!"

As if wishing to take advantage of the sudden discomfiture of the Kurds, A'asim Bey, the gigantic chief, stepped forward and seized Abbas's bridle-rein.

"Now, by Allah," he exclaimed, shrewdly noting the racial traits of the gendarmes, "this seems to be a Kurdish assault. I refuse to release the prisoner except upon the orders of your commander, Teyib Yuz-bashi."

As if in answer the lithe young Kurd, quick as a panther, plucked the saber from his belt and split the chief's skull.

For a moment all was chaos. The Circassians, shouting, cursing, came crowding about to view the body of their dead chief; then from somewhere came a roaring pistol-shot, and Abbas crumpled up and slipped slowly from the horse at Rahmet Bey's side.

The latter quieted Yildirim's plunging.

"Let us have peace," he cried to the Circassians. "Through his sudden anger it has been Allah's will that our young comrade should kill your chief. He has paid for his rashness with his life."

But the blood-madness of the Circassians as they looked upon the remains of their chief was not to be allayed. Another shot rang out, then a volley. Another of the Kurds fell from his horse, while the blood leaped out from another's breast, and the right arm of a fourth swung back shattered at the shoulder. This left but Rahmet Bey and one other uninjured.

The Kurds spurred their horses forward and their glittering sabers did deadly work among their enemies.

"To the Armenian!" cried Rahmet Bey, and the man with the bullet in his breast and he of the broken arm charged fiercely side by side.

Rahmet saw a giant Circassian drag the former from his horse, and with a mighty heave toss his living body upon the fire.

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The next instant the giant fell beneath the sword of the Kurd whose arm was broken.

Old Ohan had struggled feebly to his feet when he found his bonds loosed, and now stood, huddled, half-dazed, against a post near the fire. It was toward this post that the Kurds fought their way. Disposing of a man who held a pistol leveled at his head, Rahmet Bey bent forward from his horse and caught old Ohan about the waist. As he did so a mounted Circassian charged forward with a heavy sword.

The Kurd with the broken arm saw Rahmet's danger and turned from the man with whom he was fighting. Parrying with his own sword he saved Rahmet's life. As he did so he fell from his horse, his opponent's sword in his breast, and the blow that was aimed at Rahmet Bey reached its mark just as the Kurd swung the old Armenian to the horse's back before him. This left but two Kurds, and Rahmet dangerously wounded.

"Surround the Kurds! Do not let them escape!"

It was the voice of the Turkish commander. At last the Turks had arrived. With a whispered word to his last remaining companion, Rahmet Bey spoke to Yildirim and touched his flank.

The unexpected arrival of the larger body of gendarmes had for the moment drawn the attention of the Circassians, and the sudden leaping forward of the high-spirited horse added to their confusion, so that Rahmet Bey, followed by the other Kurd, was able to get clear of their enemies before the latter really knew what they were doing.

A moment later a body of *Zabtiyyes* was after them full tilt. The moon had risen higher, the light making them a good target, yet the pursuers fired with the uncertainty that moonlight usually gives to a marksman. Although carrying two, Rahmet Bey knew that Yildirim was more than a match for any horse in the company and, but for the slower mount of his companion, he felt no doubt of their ability to outdistance their pursuers.

The latter kept up an incessant fire with their military rifles, very different weapons from the ancient firearms of the Circassians. Once as Rahmet Bey looked back at his companion who rode at Yildirim's flank he saw the man twitch suddenly, then from his mouth gushed a torrent of blood. With an attempted smile and a gesture onward the man slipped from the saddle. A moment longer the riderless horse ran at Yildirim's side; then, as the need for lagging was past, Rahmet feebly urged his horse forward and the slower animal fell behind rapidly.

ALL next day they traveled, the gallant Yildirim bearing his wounded master and the aged Armenian as if they were light as air. As soon as they were clear of the gendarmes Rahmet Bey had made a great circuit and turned his horse's head to the southeast—toward the Kurdish mountains, the homeland of himself and old Ohan.

By mid-afternoon the Kurd's strength failed him wholly, and the raging fever obscured his brain but for rare intervals of lucidity. Now their positions were reversed; it was the feeble old Armenian whose arms supported the youthful Kurd.

"Give Yildirim to eat and drink," Rahmet Bey instructed old Ohan, when at last the exhausted old man had dropped rather than lowered the helpless Kurd from the saddle.

Then, despite his condition he saw that the horse had water and was cropping the pasture before he would accept a drink from the hands of the Armenian.

When he examined the Kurd Ohan was astounded that he could have lived so long, he was so terribly wounded. He had lost a great quantity of blood from the wound on his arm, and had received two bullets in his back during the pursuit, either of which must certainly prove fatal without immediate expert attention.

"Yildirim will take you home," went on Rahmet Bey, struggling to retain consciousness. He had told Ohan that he would die.

"Let him choose his own road, and, *Insha-'llah*, you will reach our mountains within two days' time. Then, when you take Yildirim to my mother, tell her how I died, and say that I wish my father could have lived to see that his younger son, too, could die a death that was not wholly unworthy."

"But why did you do it, boy?" demanded the old Armenian. "You are young, and had your life before you. I am old; death matters little to me—today, tomorrow—it must come soon."

The dying man smiled.

"I owed you a debt—and I prayed Allah to spare me until I could pay it. You

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remember when Shemsed-Din Agha came with me to your house, and you told him I was not one of the boys who had attacked you?"

The Armenian nodded.

"I remember."

"But I was among those boys. I was present, even though I did not injure you personally. I have always felt that I owed you something for having been among your attackers—although I realize that had you recognized me I should have been in a Turkish prison today——"

"My boy," rejoined the old Armenian, "I knew all the time."

A new light shone in the dying man's eyes as he turned painfully and clasped the Armenian's hand.

TRUE LOVE

by Bill Adams

IT'S "Johnnie," say the girls ashore "Oh, Johnnie!"
But it ain't no use to say!
A clipper's at the dock side, bright and bonny,
To sail at the break of day.

It's, "Johnnie, come and bide with me awhile now,
And it's I'll be true to you."
Ah, girls, it isn't any use for you to smile now,
For I don't care what you do!

Take you the longshore Johnnies for your loving,
And I'll take the old, cold sea,
And the thunder of her wild winds roving,
And her big ships running free.

"Oh, Johnnie, you will break my heart—the true love
That I used to think was mine!"
"Come, dry your eyes, my dear, and get a new love,
For look how the waters shine!"

It's ships that have the loving of a seaman,
And no other love I know;
I'll maybe hear your voices in my dreaming,
But your Johnnie's got to go!

Take you the longshore Johnnies for your loving,
And I'll take the old, cold sea,
And the thunder of her wild winds roving,
And her big ships running free!

"True Love," copyright, 1923, by B. M. Adams.

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"BULGY" SMITH, EXPATRIATE

BY ROY SNIDER

Author of "A Lost Masterpiece."

SMITH arrived at Bermuda in charge of ten horses and two mules shipped from Halifax via the Royal Mail Steam Packet Line. Arrangements had been made for his return passage to Halifax—steerage—and a properly attested memorandum of the agreement had been executed, but he failed to avail himself of the privilege, and elected to stay in Bermuda where the climate suited his clothes.

After a month's sojourn he had not impressed the people of the islands as being an altogether exemplary specimen of the American abroad. The slouching carriage of his loose-knit body had earned him the sobriquet "Bulgy" and his aversion to work had brought on him the scorn of a people who are not notably industrious themselves.

Following the established custom of "birds of a feather," he had thrown in with one Peg-leg Williams, a fisherman of sorts, whose distaste for laborious effort was proverbial.

Smith had a well-defined and entirely sensible reason for visiting the "isles of perpetual Summer." Unknown to any one but himself he possessed information on which he expected to realize to the extent of twelve thousand dollars, but he had not yet solved the problem of turning his secret to profit without divulging it and so being compelled to share the proceeds.

The economic arrangements of the Smith-Williams organization were extremely simple. At irregular intervals when their supply of food neared exhaustion they fared forth in Williams' boat and set fish-traps; then loafed or "hand-fished" for the remainder of the day. Late in the evening they lifted their traps, and, if the catch were reasonably good, their fishing, and all other enterprise, was ended for the time. When luck did not attend their ventures they kept at it until it did. Occasionally they convoyed tourists on fishing-trips, but made no effort to encourage this line of business because it entailed more or less continuous work.

From the commencement of their association, Smith had tacitly taken the lead as Williams was almost as sluggish mentally as he was physically, and preferred to have some one else do his thinking for him.

LARDER and exchequer were both sadly depleted. Ergo: Fish-traps must be set. Smith and Williams made their usual simple preparation for setting out and, as usual, bemoaned the necessity.

"Harwich wants fish at the 'Lone Palm'," Smith announced. "I saw him day before yesterday, and he wanted me to go out then. Guess he wants 'em yet.

"We might as well go over there and see him about it and maybe we can use two stones to kill one bird. He might have a couple of sports staying there who'll want to go fishing. He had last week. Since we've got to go out, we might as well make a job of it and get as much out of it as we can, and have it over with."

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"Good idea," assented Williams hopefully. "Besides, maybe you'd see somebody that wants to buy them golf-balls you've got and we wouldn't have to go at all."

The Lone Palm Hotel was no great distance from the cabin which the partners made their headquarters. It was not a first-class house, and, although patronized to some extent by tourists, it catered more to local than to transient trade and was more popular as a rendezvous for the men who served than for those who hired service.

When the partners entered the barroom a controversy was in progress. A capable-looking young man in conventional tourist garb had evidently taken exception to the statement or contention of a dark-visaged individual whose appearance generally was far from prepossessing.

"I tell you, Chetwick, you're butting in where you've no right to be," the dark man accused insistently. "It's no use your losing your temper an' putting up a roar. I started to work first an' I've got a right to keep on, and—" venomously—"the man that interferes with me is going to be sorry, even if he is a four-flushin' dude from New York. Take that from Abe Gilkey and swing wide of me!"

With flushed face and tight-clenched fists the younger man strode close to his opponent, and the crowd in the Lone Palm barroom drew back to let them battle.

Chetwick faced Gilkey defiantly and fearlessly with every tissue of his strong, athletic young body ready and willing to fight.

"You're a common bum and a yellow-livered coward!" he cried scornfully while the movement of his hands showed suppressed eagerness for action.

Gilkey stared at him in apparent dismay, his body cringing backward, his left arm raised before his face in a gesture of weak defense and the right swinging loosely at his side.

A moment he cringed, then his left arm flung forward in a swift arc. The edge of his open hand chopped viciously at the side of Chetwick's neck and a right fist driven by the whole weight of a practised body crushed into his ribs.

Chetwick fell like a toppled ninepin.

Gilkey stood regarding him dispassionately and almost without expression, his feet spread apart and his hands clasped behind him in the Army position "at ease."

Utterly disconcerted, dazed and hurt, Chetwick gasped short spasmodic breaths as he lay helpless on the floor, and thrice assayed to rise before he finally struggled to his feet and swayed uncertainly, staring blankly and ashamed at his opponent.

Suddenly his expression changed. A flush of mad rage suffused his face. Murder blazed in his eyes and his hand snapped to the pocket of his Norfolk coat which sagged with the weight of a weapon.

Gilkey's movement was again almost incredibly swift. His left hand darted from behind his back. A short-bladed knife slipped from the sleeve of his coat apparently of its own volition. Its point seemed barely to touch the tips of index finger and thumb as his hand swung forward. Then as Chetwick's hand jerked free of his pocket gripping an automatic pistol, the thrown knife slashed across the backs of his fingers.

Gilkey's body appeared to follow the flight of his weapon in a nimble forward leap. His hand swept out and recovered the knife before it struck the floor, and he stared a moment boldly into Chetwick's eyes, their faces almost touching.

Chetwick's pistol dropped clattering from his nerveless hand. Blood dripped copiously from his lacerated fingers. His face paled perceptibly and his teeth were tightly clenched, but though he gave way a pace, he showed no sign of fear.

"I've got enough until my hand heals up," he said steadily.

He held Gilkey's stare unflinchingly for a second, then crumpled in a faint.

Gilkey turned without a word and strode out of the place, every movement of his stocky form suggesting supple, crafty strength.

Bulgy Smith joggled his pal's elbow. "Let's get a drink an' beat it, Peg," he whispered. "We don't want to be witnesses."

They purchased drinks at the bar, paid and took their leave, while extemporary good Samaritans ministered unto the fallen Chetwick.

It was a day in early April and the Bermudas were at their best. White coral roads, luxuriant verdure and vari-tinted sea combined with cloudless sky and balmy air to make existence pleasing.

"Know either of those guys?" Smith asked his comrade as they walked out into

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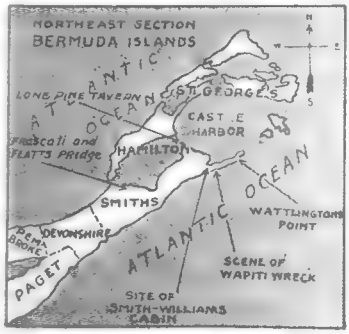
the road that passed the Lone Palm Bar.

"Both," answered he of the timber limb shortly. "The uncivilized one's Abe Gilkey—an articulated compound fightin' man and as safe to monkey with as six teased lions. Chetwick's from New York and



has money. He suffers from a delusion that he's tough, but he may get over it, now that he's bumped into Gilkey.

"Those men," he added impressively, "are the two head movers in the rival treasure-huntin' expeditions that are disturbin' the beauty of the coral rocks over on the South shore."

"I thought they didn't act normal," commented Smith. "Just think of men deliberately digging into real stiff work when they don't have to.

"Good morning," he broke off, suddenly addressing a passing golfer who strode along carrying an orthodox kit. "Wanta buy some second-hand pills cheap?" He thrust his hands into his pockets and produced several used golf balls. "I've got eleven of them and I'll sell 'em for twelve bob."

"Cheap enough," admitted the sportsman, examining the proffered pellets. "Find them on the links?"

"Found one and put it up in a crap-game and got the other ten," Smith answered carelessly. "Thanks!"

He accepted the stranger's money and rejoined his waiting comrade.

"I guess there's no special rush about goin' fishin' today," opined Williams suggestively. "You ain't likely to hone for it much until that money's spent, are you?"

"I certainly ain't," declared Smith emphatically. "Any man that's kept the sense he was born with wouldn't think of workin' when he's got money for two days' grub.

"We'll go over to Bewick's Bay and see if there's anything on the beach. Nobody'll bother us there.

"By the way, Peg, I've been with you over a month now, an' I don't know as you've ever told me how you happened to own the wreck of that old warehouse over at Bewick's Bay. I've wondered all along how you happened to have it."

"Feller name o' Beaudeau lent me two hundred bucks to buy it with, eight years ago, when I was drunk," Williams ruminated. "A man gets wonderful ideas about himself when he's soused. Beaudeau persuaded me that I was the wisest and farseeingest old owl he'd ever heard of. He knew I had *some* money and told me he was buyin' all the property around the bay on the quiet, because he had a straight tip that they were goin' to build another big hotel there, and he didn't want to buy too much in his own name for fear folks'd get wise and boost the price.

"He gave me that two hundred and took my personal note for it; then hustled me over to Fosdick's office and I bought the hundred-foot lot and those ruins on it. When I sobered up I remembered that Fosdick would 'a' been tickled to death to sell it for a hundred and fifty."

"Sounds interestin'," commented Smith. "What happened?"

"There was a treasure-huntin' spasm goin' on then just as there is every few years as long as I remember," Williams continued his narrative. "A guy named Hendrie was conductin' the operations and it was said that him and Beaudeau was both on the same lay, like Chetwick and Gilkey and hated each other just as bad."

"Likely they would," said Smith.

"I never knew," Williams went on, "just how the story got around or who started the talk, but everybody seemed to know that Beaudeau got me to buy the lot to fool Hendrie and get him to hunt for treasure there instead of at Wattlington's Point where he was working.

"It'd give Beaudeau a better chance to work there himself; but Hendrie didn't bite. He came and asked me a few questions and told me that I was a —— fool, which I guess I was.

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"Beaudeau went back to New York. The war broke out about a week after that and he went to France. I never saw nor heard of him since.

"We turn off here to go to the shore."

They continued their conversation as they made their way along a rough by-path that ran from the highway to the sea.

"It's all bunk about there being any English money buried here," averred Smith. "They didn't get it to the Confederate States that way—bringin' it here for block-ade-runners to take over to Charleston.

"Anyway the *Falcon* came from Mexico and called in here on her way to England. Of course, she was lost three days out with all her hands, so nobody knows what she left here or where it was intended for, but I'm bettin' it wasn't gold money."

"Maybe not," said Williams. "But there's a few facts about it that can't be disputed. That schooner, *Wapiti*, that's supposed to have taken the money from here, certainly tried twice to get into Charleston and was chased back here both times by patrol-ships. The second time she piled up on the reef off Wattlington's Point and drowned her crew. When she broke in two the stern section drove into the big cave that used to be there and it caved in and buried most of the wreck. That's all proven facts. Then there's the two stories about the money—one that the *Wapiti's* skipper buried the money on the point the first time he was chased back, and the other that she had it aboard when she piled up."

"Yes," said Smith skeptically. "And on the strength of that bull they've spent ten thousand dollars divin' out there on the reef and dug up five acres of hard coral rock on the point."

"Hist! Keep back," warned Williams, suddenly.

Fifty yards beyond the clump of palmettos into the concealment of which they drew, lay the island's northern shore and almost at its edge stood the ruins of what had once evidently been a fairly large structure of coral blocks and timber. One crumbling wall remained upright; the other three and the roof had fallen in a mass of jumbled débris.

Three men stood close to the remaining wall. Two had evidently been working there with picks and shovels until interrupted by the third whom the watchers easily identified as Gilkey.

He was too far away for them to catch the words he was saying but they judged from his bearing that they were decidedly hostile.

Suddenly his fist shot out in forceful contact with the jaw of one of the men, who staggered back from the blow, stumbled, regained his footing and fled forthwith, closely followed by his companion.

"Unreservedly on the prod, today," commented Williams. "Wonder what he's doin' on my property."

"Property rights don't get spoilt near as easy as a man's face," cautioned Smith, "but as we haven't done anything to him we might as well take a chance and see what he means."

Gilkey's manner appeared to be anything but truculent when he noted the approach of the partners.

He smiled affably and called a cheery greeting.

"Good morning, gentlemen. Splendid weather isn't it? I reckon you own this place." He addressed Williams who had acknowledged the accuracy of his estimate of the weather. "I saw you two at the Lone Palm and aimed to have a word with you, but leavin' in a hurry as I did I hadn't time to talk.

"I guess you know that timber's scarcer than holy water at an Orangeman's ball, here, and sellin' at twenty cents a foot. There's some fairly good stuff here amongst this wreck, and I'll give you fifty bucks for it and dig it out myself. What do you say to that?"

"Good enough for me," Smith retorted readily, "but my partner owns the works."

"Jake with me," said Williams. "Go ahead and help yourself."

Gilkey produced a pocket-book and handed over fifty dollars at once.

"I don't mind telling you," he admitted amiably, "that I want these timbers pretty bad. I guess you know that I'm digging for buried money, down the shore here a ways where that big caved-in cave is. They claim there's part of the boat that carried the money buried in the cave-in.

"It'd take a month to dig all that rock off her if I had a hundred men workin' at it, but there's a better way by followin' a crevice that starts in-shore and runs into the cave. It'll be easy to dig and widen it enough to get in that-a-way. Trouble is you go right under a nigger cabin 'fore

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it reaches the cave, and the coon that owns it won't let us work unless we pay for the privilege and shore up his shack so it won't sag down when we dig under it. I want them timbers for shoring, see! And if you want to go to work for me getting them out, I pay five bucks a day for doing it."

"That's the first sound like real wages that I've heard since I've been here, and I guess we'll take it on," answered Smith, to the surprize of Williams who cherished the idea that his comrade had an unalterable aversion to work of any kind.

In a month's association with Smith he had come to regard him as a shrewd and capable schemer and had almost implicit confidence in his astuteness. So, although the sudden change of disposition was inexplicable he took his cue from his partner and unhesitatingly agreed to go to work.

"We live in a cabin about three miles from here," Smith explained to Gilkey. "We've got a tent and we might as well bring it over and camp right here while the job lasts. We'd be here nights in case anybody got to snooping around," he finished suggestively.

"Good idea," pronounced Gilkey. "How soon can you move over here?"

"Peg could go get the outfit right now and I'll start in on the diggin'," Smith proposed. "Hire a nigger to haul it over here," he advised Williams. "It's too far to carry it."

"The coon that owns the house I want to dig under owns a horse and rig," Gilkey informed them. "Come along with me and I'll hire him to bring your stuff over."

"There's just one thing I'd like to ask you," Smith interposed. "Were those two of your employees that you fired just now?"

"No," retorted Gilkey with a grin. "They were Mr. Foster Chetwick's employees. He wants the timber for the same reason that I do. Beat me to it makin' arrangements with the nigger to dig under his house, but hasn't paid him yet. I reckon if I pay first and get the shoring in, he won't have much hold there."

He departed accompanied by Williams, and Smith took up one of the abandoned picks and commenced operations on the piles of heaped-up débris.

Ten minutes after Peg and Gilkey left him he looked up from his work to note the approach of a girl in a white duck sports suit.

"Good morning," she greeted him pleasantly, though not entirely at her ease. "Do you know where I'll find a Mr. Williams, who, I think, owns this property?"

Smith knew at once that his appearance did not inspire her confidence and that she did not relish the necessity of having to address him.

"He was here a few minutes ago," he told her bruskly. "Went to his cabin, over beyond Flatts Bridge. He'll be back here in a couple of hours."

"That's too bad," said the girl, tapping the ground with a far from patient foot. "I went to his cabin first and was told that he might be here. I may have missed him on the way. Would you ask him to call at the Frascati Hotel to see me, please? I'm one of the desk clerks there."

She handed him a dainty card on which was engraved—

MISS FLORENCE BEAUDEAU

Smith read the name and regarded its owner with interest.

"You're Floyd Beaudeau's sister, aren't you?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," she replied in a somewhat startled tone. "Did you know him?"

"In the Army," said Smith laconically. "He was hurt at Vimy Ridge. I'll tell Williams you want to see him," he added quickly to efface the moment of embarrassment. "You haven't been here long, have you?"

"Less than a week," the girl replied in a perceptibly pensive tone. "It was quite by accident that I heard yesterday that Mr. Williams had had some sort of dealings with Floyd when he was here."

"I'll send him over to see you," Smith promised her again, and resumed his work with the distasteful pick as a hint that his talk was ended.

As the girl walked away after perfunctory adieux, he watched her departing figure reflectively and a quizzical frown wrinkled his brows. Here indeed was a new and disconcerting complication. He had heard of Florence Beaudeau many times, having been closely and intimately associated with her brother, but he had never regarded her as a factor of any moment in his considerations. Now she had appeared, and his plans were likely to be disrupted.

His mind engrossed with his problem,

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he worked away mechanically, practically oblivious to his surroundings or the labor he performed.

HALF an hour later he had another visitor — Foster Chetwick — who looked little the worse for his recent encounter with Gilkey, except for his bandaged hand.

"Hello, old-timer, I see you're going to it," hailed the treasure-seeker cheerily. "I take it you're Bulgy Smith, old Peg-leg Williams' partner."

Smith acknowledged his identity with a non-committal nod.

"I was going to buy this timber in the wreck and had two men here working at it," Chetwick announced with a carelessness that was plainly assumed. "I see they've vamoosed. Are you going to dig this stuff out yourselves and offer it for sale?"

"We've sold it already to Gilkey, and he's paying for digging it out," Smith answered disinterestedly. "Seems this stuff is rather in demand."

"Twice he's beat me to it," commented Chetwick, apropos of his rival's move. "How about selling me the lot, here, before he buys that too?"

"Belongs to Williams, but he'll be tickled to death to sell it. I'm perfectly sure of that. Gilkey gets the timber, of course, for he's already paid for it."

"I see. Ask Williams how two hundred dollars cash'll suit him for the lot, will you? I've got to be getting along, but I'll see you again 'fore long. Gilkey's a friend of yours, I suppose?"

"Nothing worth mentioning," Smith retorted dryly, "but his money's as good as any one else's."

"So long," said Chetwick shortly. "I'll see you again some time."

As he walked away Smith chuckled softly.

"I admire your opinion of yourself, young man," he muttered beneath his breath. "But you're like a lamb compared with Gilkey when it comes to crooked games."

For a man who eschewed all tasks, he certainly made a very creditable showing before Williams and Gilkey returned accompanied by two other men who were evidently adherents. He had removed an appreciable amount of rubbish and exposed to view a considerable portion of a "ten-by-ten" pine-timber.

"I guess you can use *that* in your business, Abe," he addressed his employer pridefully. "It's just what the doctor ordered for shoring up a house."

"It certainly is," said Gilkey. "You're a whirlwind on the dig."

Amongst them, the four men had carried a small rolled-up tent, some cooking utensils, tools and packages of food.

"Had to tote them in from the road," Gilkey explained. "Too rough to get in here with a wagon. Used to be a road they say. But it's gone to blazes now.

"Might as well lay off for noon, I guess. We'll get the tent up and cook a batch of grub. We'll want an awful poultice, if you're all as hungry as me."

The two men who accompanied him were of a consciously rough type that flaunts its ruffianism and usually possesses little intelligence. Labor as represented by the removing of rubbish and débris did not appear to be one of their accomplishments and it was noticeable that they performed much less work than Smith and Williams in the course of the afternoon.

During the noon spell, the partners had plenty of opportunity to confer and to exchange such confidences as they chose to divulge.

"Bulgy," reproached Williams facetiously, "I always thought you were at least as lazy as me, and here you've hornswoggled us into a job."

"It'd surprize you to know that I used to be called a hard worker, once," said Smith with a whimsical smile. "I consider it a good reputation for a mule now, but I used to like it then.

"I was born at Detroit as I've told you before. Lived there most of my life and worked hard all the time. Never was farther away from home than Buffalo or Mackinaw Island on an excursion, till I signed up in 1914 and went to France with the first Canadian contingent. When I got back I didn't feel like going to work right away, and when my gratuity money was gone there wasn't much to do.

"I hung around Detroit until I got sick of being a one-town bum, then I hit up the box-cars and took to battering back doors. I blew into Halifax two months ago and when I got the chance of coming down here with a bunch of horses, I came right along. Met you the day I landed and I've been glad of it ever since."

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"How about this awful calamity of work that you wished on me when I wasn't lookin'?" queried Peg in mock reproach.

Smith explained in detail that he had a good and logical reason.

"Floyd Beaudeau was the best friend I ever had," he said, after he had explained in part. "We were in the Army together. He got nicked dragging me into a shell-hole when I was wounded, and died of wounds a week later at a base hospital. He told me about this the day before he died."

Peg-leg Williams pressed his partner's hand in a brief but earnest grip. "I'm with you in this to the last sliver in my timber leg," he said simply. "Bulgy, I thought you was a bum like me; but I know now you're a whole man, and white."

GILKEY and his two retainers left the scene of activities at about five o'clock in the evening, promising to return early next day.

"Slide over to Frascati and see the girl, Peg," Smith advised his comrade. "Just tell her the absolute truth that you've only got fifty dollars toward paying the two hundred that Floyd lent you, and that you'll give her the rest as soon as you can. Don't hint at the game that's on or she'd be pretty sure to queer it if she knew."

"Right," the peg-legged man agreed. "You'll stick right here, I suppose."

"I sure will," said Smith decisively. "Gilkey'll be back for an earful or I miss my guess pretty bad. I gave him a bug in his thinker when I told him that Chetwick was here. He'll want to dope out the proposal to buy the lot, and I've convinced him that we're brainless. I'll bet four bits he's here by eight o'clock."

In justification of his forecast, Gilkey arrived a few minutes before the hour mentioned, and with scant preliminaries broached the subject of Chetwick's offer to buy the ruins and the lot on which they lay.

"This guy, Beaudeau, got your partner to buy it for him eight years ago, when Pat Hendrie was down here huntin' for the *Wapiti's* gold," he said appraisively. "Overplayed his hand. Told it around that he was behind the deal to get Hendrie to quit workin' at Wattlington's Point and give him a chance. Too raw. Hendrie was next as soon as he heard about it."

He watched Smith's features closely while he spoke, hoping to gain a clue from a possible change of expression. But the vagabond's face showed nothing but mild interest or expectancy of a new angle of the situation which Gilkey might reveal.

"Maybe Chetwick's tryin' the same gag on you," he ventured. "He'd naturally take it I'd tell you, seein' me workin' on your job."

Gilkey reflected.

"He'd know better," he decided after a moment's consideration. "He's got a few brains himself and he'd know I wouldn't fall for it. He wants to get me guessing, that's all. These psychology sharps have doped it out that what they call the element of uncertainty is a strong card in the hand of the man that springs it, and I know that it's been proven so.

"Just to make sure," he declared suddenly, "we'll dig through this old junk ourselves, eh!"

He scrutinized Smith's face closely to see the effect of his words.

Bulgey's eyes lighted with greedy anticipation.

"You'll buy the lot then, and keep Peg an' me working at five bucks a day?" he queried.

"When you see Chetwick again, tell him I've offered you three hundred seeds and promised you at least three weeks' work at the said five per day," Gilkey answered with an assumption of bombast which did not deceive Smith in the least. "How'll that suit you?"

"Right where we live," cried his hearer. "I see us both stake-bound this week."

When Williams returned some two hours later, he found Smith alone and evidently troubled.

"How'd she stack up to you, partner?" he asked his companion as soon as he entered the tent.

Williams sat on a pile of blankets and his face was decidedly glum.

"I gave her the fifty cases, like you said," he replied. "She's up against it real bad. Got her mother down here for her health and the old lady is nearly all in. The girl's workin' to keep 'em both and I guess that fifty looks like a fortune."

"They may be on velvet tomorrow," announced Smith. "We got to get that stuff tonight. Gilkey's goin' to dig for it and he expects to gyp us and stand Chetwick off at the same time."

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He told briefly of Gilkey's pretended offer of three hundred dollars for the lot.

"Just a bluff to get a chance to feel Chetwick out, and frisk her for nothing in case his hunch is good. He's bad medicine, that guy.

"There's twelve thousand dollars in that chest, all in bars of gold," he continued in a speculative tone. "We'll give it all to the Beaudeau girl and ask her for two thousand bucks for our trouble. Floyd didn't say where he got the tip but he knew that the *Falcon* brought the gold from Mexico and it was to go on to the coast in a yacht that never showed up. The *Wapiti* is only a coincidence and has nothing to do with it at all.

"You're sure a thousand bucks is enough for you?"

"Naturally, I'd want the whole works, but when there's a chance of makin' more by followin' your tip, I'm dead willin' to be reasonable," Williams answered frankly. "If this turns out right, it's a cinch that Beaudeau's tip about the pearl-bed down in the islands is going to be all right too, and I see us gettin' rich as soon as you lead me to it."

"Let's get goin'," Smith exclaimed abruptly. "We got a big night's work ahead."

THE ruined warehouse had been originally floored with brick and a considerable area of the floor had been exposed in the excavations during the afternoon.

Smith located a spot near the center of the uncovered surface and commenced digging out the floor bricks with the aid of a convenient pick, while Williams utilized the top of the standing wall as an observation-post, lying flat in an accommodating niche where he could survey the surrounding country and note the approach of visitors, or prowlers, with little risk of his being discovered on guard, himself.

The cracked and broken bricks of the floor yielded readily to Smith's efforts and in a comparatively short time he dug out approximately a square yard of them. They were imbedded in hard-packed coral sand which he proceeded to scoop out with shovel and pick.

Beneath the sand lay another course of bricks—sound and whole and firmly mortared together—which presented a much more difficult task. There were three successive courses of well-masoned bricks to pierce, and progress was slow and arduous.

Eventually he got a hole through the stubborn masonry and proceeded to enlarge it sufficiently to admit the passage of his body.

Beneath the floor was what appeared to be a small vault whence came a dank and musty smell indicative of long disuse.

"I've got her broken open, Peg," Smith called softly to his partner. "Watch close now. I'm going in to see what's here."

He fastened the end of a rope to a balk of timber that protruded from the débris, dropped the other end into the hole he had made and climbed in after it. Darkness prevailed in the little vault but a flashlight easily overcame the handicap.

At one end of the brick-walled space was an iron door that was secured with two heavy locks and evidently opened from a tunnel or concealed passageway under the floor. A mold-covered, wooden box of perhaps two feet by eight inches by six inches dimensions lay on the floor at the base of the wall opposite the door. An old-fashioned cutlas in a metal scabbard stood in a corner. Otherwise the vault was empty.

Out of sheer curiosity Smith examined the old weapon, expecting to find it hopelessly rusted into its sheath, but to his surprize he withdrew it easily and exposed half the length of its blade. It shone greasily and he recognized the cause at once.

"Scabbard filled with oil before it was put away," he said to himself as he laid it down. "It'd stay in good condition forever."

He laid the flashlight on the floor, clove-hitched the rope around the moldy box and, on an impulse, slipped the old cutlas through the laps of the hitch. Then having returned the flashlight to his pocket he climbed out through the hole by which he had entered.

"She's here, Peg," he cried with suppressed excitement. "I'm hauling her out."

The box was decidedly heavy for its size and required some real exertion to haul it through the opening.

Williams maintained his position of watchman on the top of the wall though frankly eager to join his companion and examine the contents of the box.

The bricks that he had removed from the top of the vault, Smith cast far away amongst the débris or into the near-by sea.

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He laid pieces of rusty corrugated iron over the opening and covered them with the sand he had scooped out. Then replaced the bricks of the flooring and filled the interstices with sand and scraps of mortar; finally shoveling rubbish over the whole and scraping it off again.

The floor showed no sign of having been disturbed when he finished his operations.

"All right, Peg," he called. "We'll get this under cover now."

He made a sling of the rope and cradled the box in it while Williams scrambled down from the wall and came to aid him.

Together they picked up the box and the old cutlas in the sling and scrambled over the piles of rubbish to the corner of the wall.

"Beaudeau was no fool," commented Williams. "By advertising broadcast that he'd had me buy this place for him, he certainly threw Hendrie and everybody else off the trail, didn't he?"

"He intended to come back with a schooner, pick up this stuff and outfit for the pearl island," Smith explained. "It's funny," he added, "how the play came up. With Chetwick and Gilkey here hunting for loot, I racked my brains for an excuse to dig this up without attracting notice; and then Gilkey plays right into our hand."

"Drop it and get your hands up!" snapped a commanding voice. Foster Chetwick stepped around the corner of the wall covering them with his automatic.

Dismayed but perforce submissive they dropped their burden and elevated their hands as directed.

Chetwick stepped behind Williams and pressed the muzzle of his weapon against the small of his captive's back.

"Smith," he said harshly, "I'll blow a hole through your pal if you make one bad move. Lower your mitts, both of you. Get out your flashlight, Smith. There ought to be an address burnt on the lid of that box, if it's what I think it is. Scrape off the mold and see."

By the light of the torch, Smith brushed away the accumulated mold and dust from the lid of the box and revealed an inscription, burned deeply into the wood.

1864 1864

ADRIAN F. CHETWICK,
ST. GEORGES, BERMUDA.
CARE OF ISRAEL FOX.
FROM FABIAN A. CHETWICK,
TAMPICO, MEXICO.

1864 1864

"I'm showing you that to prove that I'm not a crook," said Chetwick. "Adrian Chetwick was my grandfather. Fabian Chetwick is my granduncle, and still alive, though a very old man. He shipped that box in the *Falcon* to be left here with Israel Fox for grandfather to pick up when he arrived, and carried to America.

"Fox had this warehouse leased from the Fosdicks who've owned it in their family for two hundred years. Fox had an interest in the *Wapiti*. He was aboard of her and was drowned with her crew when she went on the reef out here.

"We never knew what he'd done with the box of gold—there are twelve bars of it—but we always believed that he had it on the *Wapiti* with him. Lucky I happened to be snooping around here tonight or I never would have found it."

Smith grunted disgustedly. Williams cursed under his breath.

"I was hiding here behind the wall when you climbed up to keep watch," Chetwick explained. "That's why you didn't see me.

"As I said to start with, I'm no crook. You fellows found this stuff and you're entitled to a share of it. I'll give you four of the bars between you and keep eight myself. If that doesn't suit you, fight it out in court for as long as you like."

"It suits," said Smith sullenly. "Half a loaf's better'n no bread."

Williams merely nodded.

"All right," said Chetwick briskly. "Pick it up and carry it away from here. We'll divide it as soon as we're safe. Gilkey's liable to come prowling any minute and I don't want to have to kill him. I know a good place amongst the screw-palms on the other side of the road. Give me that old sword. I'll keep it for a curio."

Chagrined and disappointed in the adverse turn of fortune Smith and Williams picked up the box in its sling again and carried it away at Chetwick's direction, while their despoiler strode along behind them, his pistol in one hand and the aged cutlas in the other.

When they reached the concealment of a grove of screw-palms Chetwick called a halt.

"Frankly, I don't altogether trust you fellows," he said when the box lay on the ground again. "Smith, you'd better go to the Frascati livery and order a hack to meet me on the road here at half-past six.

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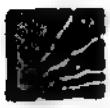
Williams will stay right here with me until you get back. It's half-past three now, and you can be back by six if you hustle. We'll divide then and stay together here until the hack arrives. Then I'll ride into Hamilton in it and you two can do as you like.

"I'm making this arrangement so in case you feel like telling Gilkey with a hope of getting a better cut of the loot, I'll promise you I'll shoot Williams at the first suspicion of treachery. Also, there won't be any chance of you or Gilkey holding me up in daylight on the way into Hamilton. Get the idea?"

Smith nodded. Chetwick, he realized, was somewhat rattled by the unexpected turn of events and trying to eliminate chances of losing what he had secured. He was really afraid of Gilkey, it appeared, and likely to do almost anything in a crisis.

Without demur or argument he set out on his errand, devoutly hoping that Gilkey would not reenter the game before his return.

He welcomed the opportunity of being alone to think—to plan to circumvent Fate's latest twist.



DAY was breaking when he arrived at Frascati, aroused a sleepy liveryman and ordered the carriage; and he was but a short distance on his return journey when the sun peeped over the horizon and flooded the world with glorious rosy light.

On an eminence two flags fluttered from their respective staffs—Old Glory and a Union Jack, newly broken out to the fresh morning breeze. Bulgy's throat contracted strangely and an unwonted wistfulness seized him.

In a spirit of adventure he had sworn allegiance to Canada and elected to serve under her flag in time of stress, as thoudans of stalwart nephews of their Uncle Sam had done. Automatically they had forfeited their rights of American citizenship and many had neglected to have these rights restored.

"I oughta have attended to that," soliloquized Bulgy. "As it is, I don't belong to—no, not to anything."

Coming toward him around a bend of the road trudged a man whom he recognized as a St. David's Island fisherman, carrying the "staff and grains" of his calling—by which unique name the native of St. David's designates his fish-spear.

Bulgy almost stumbled over a raincoat lying neglected in the road as the fisherman rounded the bend. He stopped and picked it up to examine it as the man came up to him.

"Good morning," greeted Bulgy. "You're out kind of early, aren't you?"

"Yeh," the islander replied in the quaint lisp peculiar to his people. "I bwoke ma staff an' I'm gonna have 'notha put in."

Smith noted that the haft of the implement was broken off, leaving less than five feet of its length attached to the grains.

"Thassa ve'y fine mackintosh yu foun'," observed the native interestedly. "I on'y got seven shillin' wit' me. I'll give yu that an' ma staff an' grains fo' it. Get a new staff put in an' she's wort' a quid."

"All right," agreed Bulgy handing over the raincoat. He had no particular wish to possess the fish-spear, but he was anxious to be moving.

He took the broken implement, bade the fisherman good luck and strode along his way.

A disquieting thought assailed him. Chetwick might have sent him away merely to make it easier for him to deal summarily with Peg and possess himself of the gold.

Smith quickened his pace resolved to circle around the palm-clump and approach it from a direction opposite to that by which he would be expected to return, in order to see what had transpired during his absence, before he was observed.

Accordingly, when he was close to the place, he struck away from the road, fetched a wide detour and crept cautiously up to spy.

From the screen of scrubby palmetto he surveyed the rendezvous and started back in horror at the sight that met his gaze.

With arms outflung despairingly Chetwick lay on his back undoubtedly dead, a bloody froth about his lips, his shirt-front dyed with blood and a great clot of it coagulating on the ground beside him. One of the men who had accompanied Gilkey on the previous day, huddled hideously on the ground, a bullet wound in his temple and his arms and legs drawn and bent beneath him, as if in a final, futile effort to force his body erect.

Peg-leg Williams' body sprawled limply close to Chetwick's. There was a discolored abrasion on his forehead and a smear of clotted blood, but Bulgy sensed that he was not dead.

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Abe Gilkey crouched, intensely alert, beside a vagrant sago-palm. Twixt forefinger and thumb he held a knife by its point and swung it tentatively while he watched the opening in the scrub through which he expected Smith to come. The old cutlas, unsheathed and stained with Chetwick's blood, lay at his feet and the box of gold was but a pace away.

Gilkey lay in wait to make another killing.

The pistol with which Smith believed Chetwick had slain Gilkey's henchman was not in evidence. Gilkey had doubtless scorned it, for he did his fighting with knives.

As Bulgy watched in horror, Williams' body twitched suddenly in the first throe of returning consciousness and he gasped a suddering breath.

Smith knew that he had been left for dead and that at the first sign of continued life Gilkey would dispatch him ruthlessly.

Gilkey, thief and murderer, would steal the gold and leave no witness of his crime—the gold that meant the end of poverty for the mother and sister of the man who had died for Smith in France.—France!—The Army!—*Long Point, Forward!*

The well-known words of his training-days burned in Bulgy's brain. Half-instinctively, he gripped the fish-spear in both hands, as he had often gripped a Lee-Enfield rifle with its deadly bayonet attached, and advanced on Gilkey—moving into action as he had many times "moved in."

At the sound of his first step from cover Gilkey whirled about and the knife streaked viciously through the air aimed at Bulgy's heart. Actually smiling the vagabond spurned it aside with a perfect low parry and came grimly on.

Gilkey snatched up the cutlas that lay at his feet as Bulgy Smith sprang in, and with his wonderful speed of action he parried the "long point" thrust before his body straightened.

Then they were at it to the death.

The fish-spear was a hopelessly inadequate weapon, but Bulgy had four awful years of bayonet-fighting skill to enhance his arm's efficacy.

With a savagely exultant, guttural cry he attacked. It was the low, terrible cry that characterized Canada's "riflemen" in their fiercest and bloodiest fights.

A wholly unrelated thought flashed to his intelligence. Of the thousands of American adventurers who fought in France under flags not their own, he was one of the few who came back.

Gilkey's skill in knife-fighting gave him near-mastery of the cutlas' use, though he had probably never handled a similar weapon before.

Smith attacked savagely and gloried in the havoc he wrought. Long point—withdraw. Short point, butt stroke. Parry, lunge, guard, and thrust again. They fought with the speed and ferocity of fiends—and with fiendish intent to kill.

Loose-knit, lazy Bulgy Smith knew that he faced a terrible and ruthless adversary—had known before he left the shelter of the palmetto that his first step toward Gilkey assured a fight that must be to a finish. Yet he knew no fear save that some one might arrive on the scene and discover the gold while he was unable to protect it.

He felt the savage exultation of fighting a fight that was good; he felt that victory was certain, though it might cost him dearly.

Craftily, deliberately, he maneuvered for the bayonet-fighter's last resource—for those who have developed the science of bayonet fighting to its finest point of efficiency have devised a means whereby a man who knows the trick has a reasonably good chance of inflicting a mortal wound when his own life is in gravest peril, or, if his span of life is complete, he may take his slayer with him when he goes to his account.

As he strove to close with his opponent, Gilkey sensed his intention and saw advantage to himself.

Smith knew that he must risk a mortal wound before he got past Gilkey's guard, and steeled his nerves to receive it.

Gilkey feinted cleverly at his breast. Bulgy's war-trained brain recognized the feint before it was executed. He guarded the feint with a swift high parry. The slashing cutlas, arrested in mid-stroke, darted suddenly downward for the final thrust at his vitals and was instantly deflected by the spear.

The edge of the weapon gashed a terrible wound in the vagabond's side and, though he had schooled his body to receive it, the searing pain and horrible nervous shock checked his faculties despite his warrior will.

Gilkey jerked back his weapon for the death-thrust. His arm swung back its entire length to make the point effective.

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Fighting will, perfected training and a savage lust to kill spurred Smith's dying stamina. More by force of mechanical habit than by coherent impulse of mind, his hands slid to the end of his "staff" and gripped it below the "grains." His knees bent sharply and his muscles tensed for the last effort.

"At the throat—jab!" The words he had heard and learned to act upon years before flashed to his dizzy mind, and another vagrant thought registered momentarily on his intellect.

If he should die, he might be the last Canadian-trained American who would die as stern-souled teachers of the art of war had taught him to die—killing as he met his death.

Driven by the last voluntary muscular movement of his arms, the sharp-tipped grains darted upward as his body straightened by a final effort of will. At the same instant the point of the cutlas touched the vital segment of his left groin, then thrust sickeningly into the flesh of his thigh, while the barbed grains tore and ripped and pierced the delicately vulnerable tissues of Gilkey's throat and neck.

Any one of the five spear-point wounds would have eventually proven fatal. Their aggregate infliction caused death almost instantly.

With a terrible strangling cry Gilkey threw up his arms and staggered back a step, then fell grotesquely spread-eagled on his back. Smith reeled sidewise and crumpled on the ground inert.

PEG-LEG WILLIAMS' eyelids opened to a crazy, tumultuous and meaningless world. His head throbbed excruciatingly and distasteful black spots danced before his orbs.

He closed these tortured members, and immediately opened them again. A disquieting sound of blows being struck assailed his rallying senses, and blows must mean a fight.

Williams' life had been cast in rough and unlovely lines. For many years fighting had been an essential part of his existence and fighter's instinct roused him. When he struggled to his knees the sound of the fight had ceased and he looked and saw without comprehending for nearly ten seconds.

Then the havoc that his eyes beheld cleared his mind and started him into action.

He rose unsteadily to his feet, staggered to where his comrade lay and dropped on his knees beside him.

"Bulgy," he cried anxiously. "Did he get you? Bulgy!"

Smith opened weary eyes and smiled into the face of his friend.

"You'll see that Florence Beaudeau gets the gold, Peg? Make sure of that first thing," he weakly enjoined his pal.

"I sure will, Bulgy. Trust me to. I'll do it."

Feebly the stricken man's hand strayed to the bronze Canadian Service badge in the pocket-flap of his shirt.

"Leave that on when you bury me, Peg. I want to have it with me." His voice was a trifle stronger, now. "And, Peg, tell the consul I'm from Detroit so he'll put in an American flag. You'll be sure to do that, won't you?"

"I will, Bulgy. I swear to Gawd I will. But——"

Bulgy's smile assumed the proportions of a near-grin.

"You won't have to do it for a while yet, Peg, if you stuff up the holes he made in me and get me to a doctor quick enough. He aimed for my groin, and I thought he had me sure, but he didn't savvy a bayonet-fight. I straightened up for a throat-jab just as it touched me and got it in the leg instead."

Bulgy lay perfectly still for the space of thirty seconds. He breathed very softly and his eyelids nearly closed, then fluttered slowly open.

"Rifleman Smith, a casu'lty, sir," he whispered—and smiled again.

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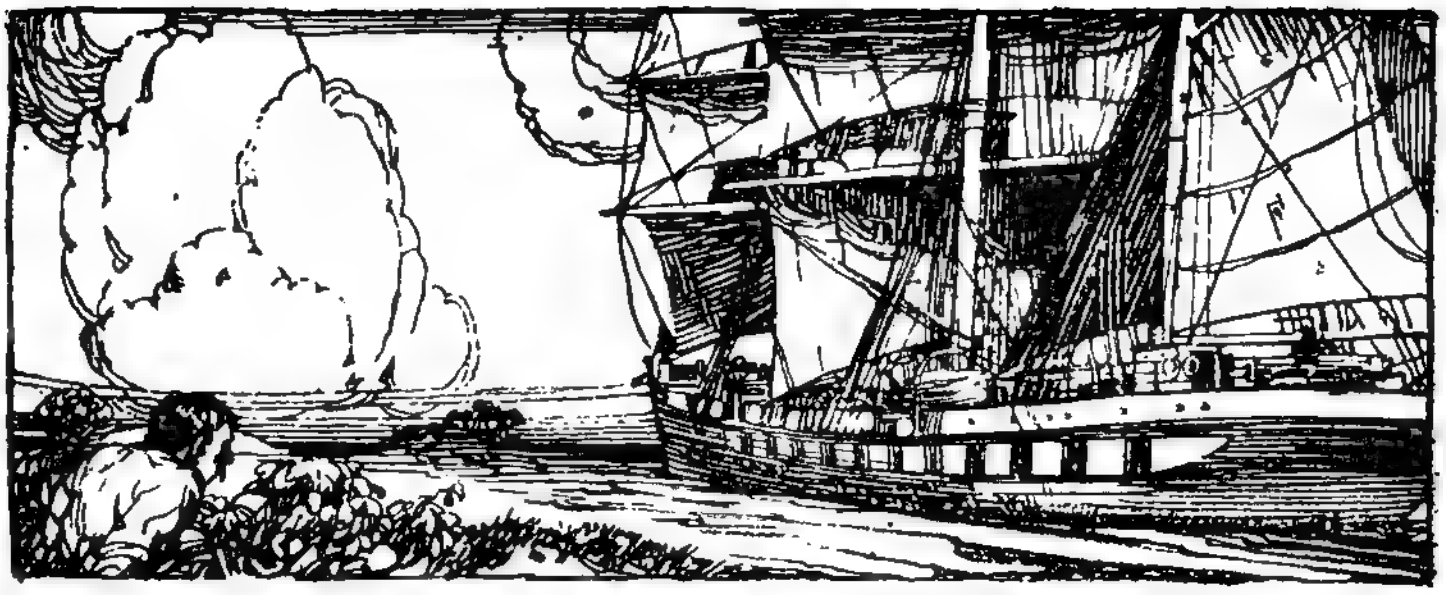

HURRICANE WILLIAMS' VENGEANCE

A Four-Part Story—Conclusion

by GORDON YOUNG

Author of "Horreszko," "Wrong Blood—Strong Blood," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

IT WAS not quite by chance that McGuire and Delaney met Pete Mathers. They found him lying on a mat in the shade of a breadfruit-tree. He was quite drunk.

McGuire and Delaney offered him one hundred dollars to take them to an island in the Solomons and, because Mathers needed just that sum to buy a native girl, Mathers agreed to give them passage.

"I'm not leavin' for three or four days," he said. "Be back here tomorrow or the next day."

But McGuire and Delaney put no faith in the gross man and smuggled themselves on board the *Jack and Jill* that day. They hid in one of the cabins and so witnessed the cold-blooded bargaining of Mathers with Buli for the girl A-Ina.

That same afternoon Mathers sailed.

A little later the two men emerged from their hiding-place and prevented Mathers from abusing A-Ina. They made Mathers a prisoner and took command of the ship.

Mathers, fearing for his life, confessed the true story of the attack on the *Good Shepherd*. He told how Slade Willerby's men, impersonating Hurricane Williams and *his* men, had attacked the mission ship, brutally killing the bishop and his followers—men and women. Falsely accused of that evil deed Hurricane Williams had been outlawed and a price put upon his head.

"Why did Willerby do it—the *Good Shepherd*?" McGuire asked.

"I'll tell you. The missionaries always fought hard against the Willerbys, an' Bishop Johnson led 'em. Slade said: 'We'll just put an end to this —— old church meddler, and make it hot for that blasted Williams, too. But it was Terry Rand that showed him how to do it. It was Terry what played you, McGuire."

"After I have met the gentleman he may not care as much for the part," McGuire murmured mildly.

The course of the *Jack and Jill* was now set for Bakari—Hurricane Williams' headquarters.

The Kanaka crew accepted the new order of things, but it was obvious that, should Mathers appear, they would rally to their old captain. Consequently Delaney and McGuire kept watch and watch. It is well they did so for Mathers managed to escape from his cabin, and persuaded the Kanakas to rush McGuire. But that man was on the alert, and the attack failed.

About the middle of the afternoon McGuire saw a high-stemmed war-canoe coming for them at a speed that caused the water to fly from the bow. Almost at the same time another canoe glided from behind a small island ahead.

The natives had seen the ship, and maneuvered to approach it from two directions.

The natives proved to be friends from Bakari and, in a little while, the *Jack and Jill* was safely at anchor.

La Salle, a young naturalist, greeted them. He had been brought to the island by a Captain Douglas. From his description of the man, Delaney and McGuire knew that Douglas was really Hurricane Williams.

La Salle told the two men of a trip to a near-by island of Kakarutu.

"There was a ship at anchor there," he said. "She was badly smashed up. The captain was badly frightened. He offered me two hundred pounds if I would take him away."

A strange, savagely beautiful woman and her daughter, Doris, lived on the island. The woman—her name was Lania Du Beque—was very sick, and fearing that she would die and leave her daughter at the mercy of her foes—Slade Willerby and *all* men—had told La Salle the story of her life.

"Doris' father's name was Stanley," she said. "He was hanged for a crime he did not commit. But if he were alive today he should never know that Doris is his daughter. He would hate her because—I am what I am."

She concluded—

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"And I want you to promise that when your Captain Douglas returns, you will bring him here that he may take us away."

This story of La Salle's gave McGuire and Delaney much food for thought. They knew that Lania Du Beque had been the wife of Williams, and that Doris Stanley was his daughter.

The next few days were dull and uneventful. Delaney, McGuire and La Salle passed the time fishing; A-Ina—Delaney had announced that she was his wife, to save her from the Bakari islanders—had made friends with girls of the island and was quite happy; Mathers was kept in close confinement.

Then came word that a ship was on the reefs and that another ship, aided by natives hostile to Bakari, was attacking it.

"That's Williams on the rocks," said McGuire, "and the other one that's after him must be a Willerby ship."

Then to the island chief he said:

"Marugi, call up your men. Out with the canoes. Send word to all your villages to get out their boats and follow us."

So, by clever and much hard fighting, the rescue of Williams was affected, but the Willerby brig made good its escape.

Later that night McGuire told Williams of the woman Lania Du Beque. But it took all of his courage to speak of Doris Stanley—Williams' daughter.

"She is dead," said Williams. "I have seen her grave—knelt there—put flowers there. I carved her name in the stone that's there."

The next day Williams went to Kakarutu whither La Salle had preceded them.

He took Lania Du Beque, Doris, La Salle and the Kingsmill Islanders off on his ship and sailed back to Bakari. Lania endeavored to influence La Salle and her daughter against Williams, who was now determined to sail to Willoughby Island, intending to take Slade Willoughby and his men to Sydney to stand trial for the *Good Shepherd* affair.

He told Lania that he would take the Kingsmill Islanders with him—fearing that if he left them behind they would aid her to escape.

Lania managed to get word to Areko, the chief of the Kingsmill natives.

"Help Williams beat Slade Willoughby," she said. "Fight well. But when you are coming back, kill Williams. Beware, for he is a terrible man. You will do that?"

"I obey," said the savage.

When the time came for Williams to set sail in the *Islander*—he left McGuire to take care of the women and the *Jack and Jill*—La Salle at first refused to go; but Williams picked him up and dropped him into the canoe, and La Salle, realizing that he was helpless, protested no more.

After Williams' ship had left, the *Neptune*, with Slade Willoughby and Terry Rand on board, came to Bakari. The crew looted the villages, mutilating, torturing the men, women and children they captured. Lania Du Beque, Doris and McGuire were taken aboard the *Jack and Jill*.

When Mathers was released from the hut where he had been imprisoned, he came out to the ship intending to kill McGuire before that man could tell Willoughby that he, Mathers, had confessed all about the *Good Shepherd* affair.

But McGuire made his escape to the *Neptune* and hid in one of the water tanks.

Mathers, reeling drunkenly, belaying-pin in hand, entered the deck-house where the girl, A-Ina, had been imprisoned. He closed the door and fumblingly made it fast.

Then he turned and faced his captive.

VII

THE *Neptune* was searched from lazaret to forepeak, high, low and along the side, even under the channels, for it seemed impossible that McGuire could have swum from the ship without being seen from either the barque, schooner or beach. Twice the cover of the water-tank was moved, and the last time McGuire nearly drowned himself for though the man had got down after a quick glance the cover was not slipped back for an hour or more; not until the cook, who returned about the middle of the afternoon told his galley helper to get up there and push it back.

Willerby cursed Hornabuck; Captain Mason of the *Neptune*, when he came back from the nigger hunt, cursed him; Fellowe cursed him; and Hornabuck took it with a pale, drawn face, cursing them in return—under his breath.

Until almost sun-down the *Neptune* was like a madhouse; then it became the reluctant opinion that McGuire had got off, and the search stopped.

Willerby, on Captain Mason's advice, who found the tide against them and did not like nosing through a strange passage in the dusk, decided to leave the following morning; but to bring Madame Du Beque and Doris into comfortable quarters before dark.

Fellowe had already gone back to the *Jack and Jill*. Much of his ugly mood had worn off. He had no particular conscience, and no mercy, but his passions frequently swung about from incomprehensible violence to generosity that, in him, was even more incomprehensible; and he was now feeling in a more pleasant mood because in the searching he and Willerby had got over their anger at each other.

He went to the deck-house. No one was before the door. It had been smashed with an ax. Inside, a body lay on the deck, dead or dead drunk. When Fellowe stooped down and roughly jerked Mathers over on his back he saw no wound nor any sign of

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life. He swung back his foot and drove it deliberately against Mather's chest, and went out, swearing fearfully.

Aft, he found the big savage he had put on guard at the deck-house now before the companion.

"What you doing here?" Fellowe said angrily.

"Girl she no get away. Girl she down there."

"You seven different kinds of a blankety-blank fool! I'll teach you some tricks you won't forget in a hurry."

He stood for a moment undecided whether to begin at once by knocking the fellow all about the deck; but was just turning away—for some other time would do as well when there were more natives about to see the object lesson—when Doris suddenly appeared.

Her bearing was angry and quiet, yet she was plainly agitated, but with that amazing lack of fear, which somehow was not boldness, in her manner.

"You will please come with me into the cabin," she said in a way that was not a threat, a command nor a request; it was just a statement, during which she regarded him with a strange firmness.

He thought that Lania wanted to speak with him. When she saw that he was coming Doris turned and went below. He followed.

At the foot of the companion, before he had cleared the last step, she pointed, and said:

"There—*there!* I wanted you to see!"

Fellowe gave a start and, for a moment with his mouth parted, stared; then he turned without a word and hurried up the companionway, and went forward swearing to himself, not cursing. He wanted a drink. There is something in an idiot face that will upset the toughest stomach. He had seen the little A-Ina, the side of her forehead swollen and black, sitting with slack jaw and dull, listless eyes from which the vaguest sparkle of intelligence was gone.

Terror and the belaying-pin had turned her into an idiot before Doris reached the deck-house and made the big savage break in the door. There had been an intensity about her that the big native had not dared oppose.

But now when Fellowe left the cabin Doris, though the daughter of Madame Du Beque, the daughter of Williams, with all her heritage of their strange poise and courage, felt her heart sicken as if her blood had become water. She went to her mother and burying her face in the covers beside the rough bunk, cried:

"Oh mother, mother! I hate men, I hate all men! They are beasts, they are brutes! That child, that pretty child—I wanted him to see what he had done! Oh mother—Mother of God, hear me and let vengeance fall upon these devils that take the shape of men!"

Madame Du Beque lay in a daze of sickness that seemed very close to death. One of her long, graceful hands moved toward her daughter's head, but the distance was too great for her weakness; and if she heard at all it was mingled with dim trance-like fancies.

A few minutes later Willerby came to the schooner to remove the women to quarters that were prepared for them.

"What's the matter with you?" he said to Fellowe.

"That blasted Mathers is drunk, and beat the girl with a pin. Ugh!"

"Doris?"

"No. McGuire's nigger. He knocked her crazy. I had no idea a thing like that would upset me. Wait till you see her. Ugh!"

"Mathers seems crazy himself."

"Say, and listen, Slade. There's something else. I've been your friend, and I was old W. W.'s friend. Now, boy, don't make a fool of yourself over that other girl."

Willerby put a hand on Fellowe's shoulder and smiled with self-assurance—

"I don't use a belayin'-pin, Bob!"

"It isn't that. But you know Lania Du Beque, and I know her even better than you do. Look out for her."

"She's about through."

"You can't get the best of her, Slade. Look what she did to Blackbird Miller. By the way, those niggers got him. Too —— bad they didn't get Pete Mathers, too!"

"I'm going to make her come to time, Fellowe. She's had every thing her own way too long. I know every inch of her history."

"Then you ought to know that you're playing with dynamite. She'll get you, Slade. She'll get you some way. She may be dying or she may be putting on; it makes no difference, if she's after your head—she'll get it. Now take the advice of a hard old —— that's never balked at anything you or

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old W. W. himself wanted done, and for once let a girl that you want alone."

Willerby patted his shoulder, saying it was the native girl that had upset Fellowe.

"I never could stand the look of an idjit face, but I am warning you about Lania. She's got more than one man, clever boys—like you."

"I'll see to it that she doesn't put a knife in me. I know her as well as you do, Bob."

"She may get somebody to do it for her."

"Not with the face she's got now. And I'm not going to let anybody I don't trust get close to her."

"She'll bribe 'em."

"I'll take charge of that jewel-box myself. They're mine anyhow. She's through. She had everything her own way for a long, long time. But she's done now."

"Then you don't know her like I do," said Fellowe.

"She's half-dead. Just holding on with her nails."

"I don't care. Slade, if you bother that girl, she'll get you—Lania will get you somehow. You know I'm only telling you for your own good. I don't give a —— what you do to get a little fun, but Lania Du Beque got the best of every man she ever went after. She may be sick and all that, but she won't let herself die as long as there's any danger of something happening to that girl of hers. For all your experience, you don't know women! Why, even your father was afraid of her. And she'll get you, Slade; she'll get you if there's a glimmer of life left in her!"

Willerby laughed a little. It was amusing to hear old Bob Fellowe preach.

When Willerby went into the cabin he almost ran into A-Ina before seeing her. She was alone, in a chair by the table. Her hands lay motionless, palm up in her lap. Her grass-skirt was spotted, and blood dribbled afresh down the side of her face. With mouth loosely open, she looked up, her eyes heavy and dull. She stared vacantly.

Willerby shuddered, almost sickened.

Doris came from beside her mother, her eyes were red, but their gaze was steady.

Willerby's voice was quiet, almost pleasant. It was not all an assumed manner. With a gesture toward A-Ina—he did not want to look at her—he said that it was terrible; that he had already given orders to have Mathers punished.

Doris believed him, though she did not like him any the better. She dreaded going on the *Neptune*, but anything was better than remaining where she was, with her mother sick in that miserable, hot little room. Beside, they were returning to Valkua. Her mother had at last said that she wanted to go.

"She must come with me," Doris now said, indicating A-Ina.

"I will have Fellowe take her home, to her own people."

"It was his fault. He is as evil as the other man, Mr. Willerby."

"Out in these islands, off from everybody, men get that way—some of them. You don't want her on the *Neptune*."

"No, I don't *want* her, Mr. Willerby. Why, she hardly knew enough to drink when I brought her water. She would starve. The poor, poor little thing. Oh I hate you men, I hate you!"

Her eyes glistened fiercely through tears.

"Miss Stanlea, I give you my deepest assurance that I am horrified. I have ordered Mathers to be punished. Just as soon as I can get hold of another man to take his place, I shall send him out here to replace Fellowe. And I promise you, on my honor, Miss Stanlea, that I will make arrangements to have her taken to her island. She will be taken care of. Natives never harm people like—this."

"You will do that?"

"I promise you. Before I leave this ship."

Again Madame Du Beque was carried up the companionway to the deck on her mattress. Her efforts and fears earlier in the day had exhausted her strength; now she was hardly conscious. She was let down gently over the side into the boat, and Willerby with great care assisted Doris.

A-Ina had followed them on deck, moving stupidly, her eyes glazed. She did not try to go with Doris. At last, she had no fear. She looked over the rail, but at the water. Its sheen seemed to fascinate her.

"Fellowe," said Willerby, in an authoritative voice, "now remember what I told you. You see that this girl gets home to her island. You send her back."

Then he drew down his right eye in a long, tight wink.

"I'll do that, Slade. I'll surely do that the first thing."

On the *Neptune* Doris began to feel a little reassured, just slightly less uneasy. There was satisfaction in finding the comfort

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and attention that her mother would have. Two large beautiful staterooms, below deck, with a door between, were given them. The furnishings were attractive. There was plenty of light and air. No one else had quarters below deck, so they had the entire lower cabin to themselves.

Doris was too inexperienced in the ways of the world to know that, especially for women, there can be as much danger where luxury has put its touch as among the meager, hard barrenness of rough men's quarters. And without at all liking Willerby, it was utterly beyond her understanding that manners could so belie character. Blackbird Miller, Mathers, Fellowe, even Williams, had appeared to her to be just what they were. Willerby was now attentive and courteous, extremely solicitous.

But once when Terry Rand came below with Willerby about something or other, and was introduced, she gazed at him with frank dislike.

Rand felt it. Afterwards he told Willerby he could not understand what he saw in that girl. But he lied in the saying of it.

"You're all wrong in the way you are trying to handle her. I know that kind. Take her by the top of the head and show her you are a man. Bat 'em around. They like it. Get down on your knees to 'em, an' they look right over your head."

"Mathers tried it."

"Yeah, but he hit too hard. Why, I had that little nigger ready to eat out of my hand. Didn't say ten words to her. They all pretend to be stand-offish. That's part o' their game. But when you really know 'em, you see through 'em. You're setting out to be too good to that girl down there."

The *Neptune* was leaving the next morning with the tide at four.

Fellowe had said that he would let his men have the best part of another day in the bush. Perhaps they could find some trace of McGuire; anyhow get a few more shots at the niggers.

The *Jack and Jill* would head back for Willerby Island late in the afternoon.

VIII

McGUIRE never knew how many hours he remained in that tank, up to his neck, suffering from almost everything but thirst; no bell was struck on the *Neptune*, and with the cover over the top he could not even tell when it became night except by movement and voices about the evening meal in the galley. He could not hear what was going on about the deck and time and again let his imagination make him believe that the ship was under way. He made up his mind several times that he could not wait another minute—then waited.

Finally he decided to get out, and inch by inch edged the cover back, then raised his head up over the rim and looked around. Everything was dark, and quiet.

He was agile as an eel and crawled out cautiously. The dripping splashed to the deck with what seemed to him a loud sound. He wanted to slip off noiselessly; though if discovered he would take a header overboard and swim for it.

There would at least be an anchor-watch, and a mate on deck, with some of the men sleeping on chests with arms near by in case the natives should try to get aboard. No one believed that they would try; but the precaution would undoubtedly have been taken.

He opened the galley door slightly. Sounds carried across the still deck, and he heard voices talking. They were well aft.

He looked aloft. The sky was partially clouded.

He edged out on the deck, looking furtively all around, listening. The voices went on in a low mumble. He put out his hand and drew back as if stung. He had touched a sleeping body on top of a chest. McGuire sank down. The man stirred, muttered, turned over. McGuire waited, then noiselessly crept to starboard. The men who were talking stood to port.

McGuire moved along the side of the forward deck-house until he came abreast the foremast. He picked up a coil of rope and paid it out until he reached the rail, then with almost one movement flashed over and out on to the channel. He paused, listening, ready to dive. There was no sound. No one approached. No one had seen him. Making fast his rope he let himself down, easing gently into the water.

He sank and dived, swimming under water; then when he needed air he turned over on his back and came up, breaking the surface with only his face. For a few moments he floated, breathing deeply, listening. Then turning quickly, he dived again, breaking the water but not unlike the

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splash of a fish. In that way he could make about a hundred feet at a time, and he was swimming for the nearest islet. He floated and dived with cautious patience. He could not tell how much phosphorus was in the water, though there was some. Once he thought he saw vague shapes at the rail, pointing; but he listened, and there was no alarm given.

At last he reached the islet, crossed it quickly and went into the water. The islet foliage was now between him and the ships. He lay on his side, native fashion, and streaked ahead. Almost half the night he swam from one island to another, working his way, not toward the beach, but up toward the entrance of the lagoon, some three miles from Bakari. He swam with inexcitable perseverance, tired but not stopping.

He knew that the first thing in the morning the natives would be put ashore and run far up and down the beach, looking for tracks where they came up out of the water; but they could not search all of the islands; and by being up near the mouth of the lagoon he would be able to hail Williams when he returned.

When he thought that he had gone far enough he crawled up into the scrub of an island and, worn out, lay down and slept.

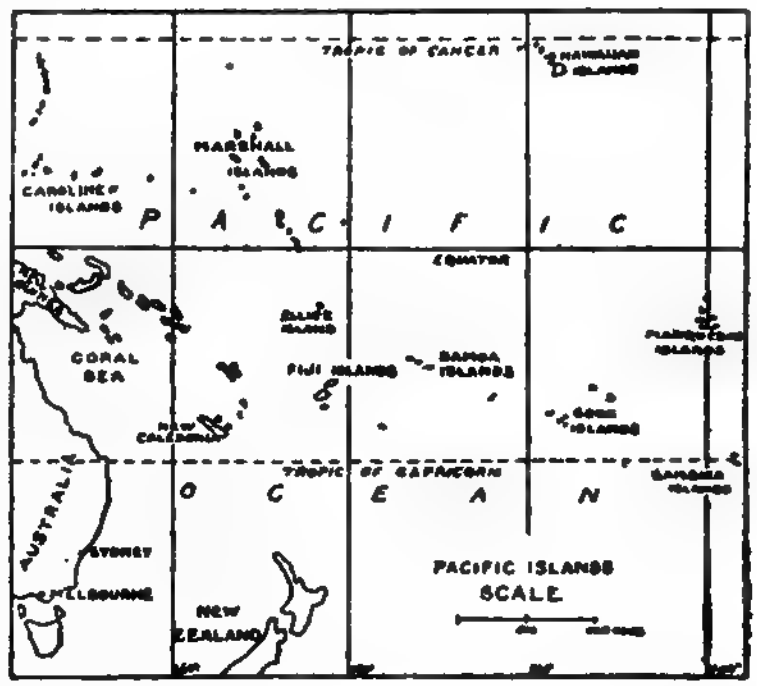
He awakened chilled and stiff. It was early morning. He pushed his head through the bush and saw the bark coming up through the channel, moving slowly. He sank back and peered from between leaves. There was hardly any movement among those on deck except from the two sailors out on the channels that heaved the lead, crying out the depth with a loud sing-song. The *Neptune* passed close in to where he lay. McGuire could have thrown a stone on board. Through the open port he saw a girl's face as she peered steadily watching the land, apparently, drift by.

Hour after hour McGuire waited. He could not see to seaward, so he did not know whether the *Neptune* had headed east or west. When the *Jack and Jill* did not follow he was sure that a search was being made for him. He again grew sleepy, but kept himself awake. He was hungry, but there were no coconuts about. He found berries but would not eat them, for he did not know what they were. He waited on and on, with that lazy inexhaustible patience that characterizes the man who has waited on tides and wind. He walked out into the open water and judged by his shadow that it was between twelve and one. Shortly afterwards he saw the *Islander* swing round a neck of land.

The *Jack and Jill* was trapped. There was no other way out.

McGuire knew that Williams would pass close to the islet where he was. That was why he had come. So he sat on a rock and waited.

She came on slowly. When he saw men gather at the rail and point toward him,



McGuire stood up and waved an arm. He waited for a time, then wading out to his armpits began to swim with long, slow, easy strokes.

Delaney stood on the rail, his hand to a stay. The eyes of every one were on him; but no one shouted out. They knew that something evil had happened. When he was about a hundred feet off, Delaney looked down and spoke to the man below him, and the man handed up a coil of rope. A minute later Delaney tossed it out with a dexterous twist. The rope uncoiled as it went, and struck the water almost straight. McGuire grasped it and was pulled alongside; then he climbed up, hand over hand.

Delaney lifted him over the rail and set him on his feet before Williams, who at one glance covered McGuire from feet to head, then looked into his face and waited.

McGuire said quietly:

"Willerby came in with half a hundred men, cleaned up the village, and sailed this morning—I think for Valkua. The girl and Madame Du Beque with him. They caught

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me, but I got away and came here to tell you that Fellowe and his natives are still in here with the *Jack and Jill*."

"How many?"

"I don't know, but I would say about forty."

"He left for Valkua?"

"That's my guess. He was intending to go before I got off."

"Doris and Madame Du Beque, McGuire?"

"I think they are all right, skipper. I saw the girl looking out of a port as the *Neptune* went by. She didn't seem frightened, so I judged that her mother was with her."

"You don't know what was said between Madame Du Beque and Willerby?"

"I don't know much, skipper. I put in most of my time yesterday in the galley water-tank. Last night I got off."

"And they didn't search there?"

"They did that. Three times."

"And the village, McGuire?"

"I don't know how many they got. There was shooting all day. They burned it, of course. Broke up the canoes. Mathers came to the schooner and tried to kill me for fear I'd tell he had given them away. Fellowe and Willerby kept him off—were going to take me into Sydney. They are all here now, except Slade and Terry Rand. I saw Rand on deck as the *Neptune* went by. He and Willerby have got away."

"They will be found, McGuire. Tomorrow *we* leave for Valkua."

Williams turned away and went aft, below deck, where he began to break out the arms.

"And A-Ina? What 'ave them —— done to her?" Delaney asked.

McGuire shook his head; then he was almost buried beneath questions. Ghobau and Marugi asked him over and over things that he already had told them he did not know. Marugi struck his breast and cried out:

"*Ko-i! Ko-i! Ko-i!*"

Little old Ghobau's monkey-face hardly showed a sign, except that his eyes glittered. The five or six other Bakari men gave way to a wild rage.

"Where's Lania's men?" asked McGuire of Delaney.

"Down in the hold, every mother's son ov 'em—instid ov baying chopped up an' fed to sharks as they desar-r-rve. 'Twas as near to not 'avin' the Skipper, McGuire, as 'twill iver bay till the Black One touches his shoulder an' says, 'Come along wid me!'

"Them ——s were right as rain till afther we hit the island an' found nothin' but some blacks an' a sick white. We laid aboard the brig thot was in the bay an' took what might be naded f'r ourselves, then out we scoots wid all sail set and stays'ils thick as wet clothes on a line.

"'Ould Hurri-cane can think thray toimes daper than th' —— hisself, which is why we're all here to tell yez about it. Afther we left the island he clapped all fire-arms down in the cabin, as a rifle's an unhandy thing f'r a man thot don't need it.

"Thot Areko, McGuire, was suckled by th' mither ov Satan herself. He had one ov his men at the wheel, an' Areko waited till Williams was on the quarterdeck by hisself, then he comes to Williams an' sez as how he'd like a bit ov bacon-rind to smear the foot ov a man ov his thot's shtepped on an edge ov a clam, which Williams knows happened at the island.

"Williams sez, 'Go down in th' panthry an' tell the boy to give it yez.' Misther Areko drops down into the cabin, cracks the boy over the head, takes a rifle out ov the rack an shlips in a shell thot he's been savin' for jist this trick, for ye know —— well thot Williams had all the shells locked up.

" 'Oh ho,' sez Misther Areko to his self, 'this is where Oi git famous.'

"An' up he comes, like a cat. The man at the wheel sees all is ready f'r himself to spake up, so he calls Williams over to 'ave a look at the compass, which puts Williams wid his back to the companion.

"Misther Areko, wishin' to make shure, sneaks up till the mouth ov that gun is widin two feet ov the skipper's head. Ould Williams has his eyes down on the compass, but ye know how when he looks at somethin' he sees iver'thing else in the neighborhood; an out ov the corner ov one o' them eyes o' his he sees a shadder on the deck.

"He don't turn around an' ask what's the matther, an' git the front ov his head blowed out instid ov the back. He ducks an' wheels an' the bullet goes over his head an' blows a hole big as your fist in the man at the helum, which serves him right. An' ould Williams comes up wid a jump, one hand at Misther Areko's throat an' the other tearin' away the gun an' holdin' it up f'r a club. Ow there's nothin' quicker under hivin than

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ould Hurri-cane Williams when he's in a hurry.

"An' would yez baylieve, but them —— Kingsmill niggers was all set to take the ship from us, an' the spake ov the gun is the signal. Oi 'm settin' paceable as a lump on a log, wid palm an' needle double-reefin' the seat ov me canvas-britches when at the sound ov thot gun one ov them sons ov Satan tries to cut out me heart through the back ov me shoulder. Wid a back-hand swing Oi knocks him into the scuppers an' jumps on him. There was fightin' iver'-where, for them fellers was armed an' riddy. Oi out wid me knife, ducks a row ov sharks' teeth, makes a swipe at one wid steel an' anither wid me fist, an' puts two men down where f'r the toime bayin' they lay quiet an' paceable as they will a hunthred years afther they're dead.

"Then Misther Areko yells f'r 'em to shtop. Williams has faced him around an' told him to spake up, an' he spakes. Yez could av heard him yezself if ye'd cocked half an ear, he was thot anxious to bay undtherstood by iver'body.

"The ould *Irelander* has broached to an' is rolling loike a drunk man wid the cramps, wid iver'thing shakin' an' slidin' an' whippin' about the deck. An' what does Williams do? He jist lets go ov Misther Areko's neck an' tells him to git for'r'rad an' shake a leg. An' they all work loike good little bhoys—me heavin' on a sheet beside the man Oi was riddy to knife—till we gits all straightened out an' is crackin' on.

" 'Clane up the deck,' says Williams.

"They turns to an' clanes up the mess they've made, which is mostly wid their own blood, though there's only one ov them thot's dead enough f'r the divil's gridiron.

"Then Williams says to Misther Areko—

" 'Come here.'

"An' he comes. An' Williams says:

" 'Oi know all about why yez did thot, an' Oi don't blame *you*. But f'r the gineral health ov yez an' yer men who are loikely to git throwed overboard by me crew, yez take off the for'r'rad hatch, an' all yez c'n go down there an' set on yer tails an' meditate.'

"Them bay not jist his words, but they've got his meanin' in them. Thot's exactly what Misther Areko does, an' where he is. May th' —— crack his bones f'r the marrow!"

IX

WILLIAMS now gave rifles and trade tomahawks to every man on deck, and when they were all armed, he told Delaney to have the Kingsmill men come aft. They came, the nine of them, slim-bodied, broad-chested fighting men with hawk-like eyes. Seeing everybody under arms they thought they were about to be cut down, and some of them showed uneasiness, none of them fear.

Williams spoke to them, addressing Areko. He spoke directly and without reproach or promise, did not even allude to the recent and treacherous attack. He simply told them the situation, that Madame Du Beque, to whom they were as loyal as feudal courtiers to their queen, had been carried off by Willerby; that he was now going in to fight Willerby's men, and if they won the fight he would at once follow after the *Neptune*. Did they want their arms or would they prefer to sit in the hold through the fight?

With fierce short, eager yells they cried out for arms.

La Salle—who still had a sense of grievance, and had remained aloof from everybody on the ship, had been anxiously questioning McGuire about Doris, and asking a hundred other questions concerning Williams, the *Good Shepherd*, Mathers, Willerby, over which he had passed many hours when he should have been asleep—now asked in utter amazement how Williams dared do such a thing.

And McGuire answered:

"He knows the natives as he knows the sea and the wind, all of which kill without hating you and are treacherous without malice. And he might as well refuse to use a head wind as to not use those fellows when he needs men. They'll fight like demons. It's in their blood anyway. But if Lania Du Beque tomorrow should tell them to shoot him—they would probably shoot him. Or try to. He knows it. You white men, La Salle, don't know the first thing about a blind, headlong loyalty. You lost it when you started the theory that one man's as good as another, and you quit being fools enough to have kings—and queens, like Lania. And Williams knows that as long as they have to depend on him to take them to Lania that they will help him cut through anything and anybody that stands in the

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way. So there you are. He isn't being generous and they aren't being grateful. He's merely a great sailor, whether with wind or men."

"A strange man," said La Salle. "I don't understand him."

"You never will. You are a decent sort of fellow, La Salle; but you judge a man by what's said of him, which comes from reading newspapers and reward notices—you saw the one in Williams' cabin?—instead of looking into a man's face and seeing for yourself what is there."

"I have looked, McGuire, and seen nothing but the fierce eyes of a desperate man."

McGuire smiled drowsily:

"Aye, desperate as a man crossing —— on a tight-rope; but he hasn't said a word, though you put aside the gun that was offered you, and are not going to fight with us."

"No. No," said La Salle, quietly stubborn. "I can't do that."

"He knows your feeling better than you know it yourself. He knows you aren't a coward, or you would never have come to New Georgia. He knows you think we are one bunch of ruffians getting ready to cut the throats of another, perhaps not quite as bad as ourselves. And he knows that it takes more courage of the sort that he admires most, to fold your arms—like you did—and shake your head at a rifle than to take it and bang away at the air."

"But why doesn't he go on after the *Neptune?* Why does he waste all this time here? If that lovely girl *is* his daughter, I think he would——"

"But the *Good Shepherd*, the *Good Shepherd*, La Salle. Two of the men that did it are here. And I'll tell you something—" McGuire paused and, with a slow queer smile that was not pleasant, regarded him for a moment—"you'll be drunker with fight-madness than any man on the ship before this day is out!"

La Salle looked as if he thought McGuire was saying that merely to give him a jolt.

"I haven't seen it, but I know what's piled on the beach, La Salle. You'll see the heads of men that brought you birds to skin, of women that brought you taro and fish, of children that brought you orchid bulbs and bugs—you'll know their faces, clotted with blood and already withering as if from pain."

"Don't. Don't! Ugh, McGuire!"

"Aye, don't!" said McGuire bitterly. "And there'll probably be something else."

He did not say what it was, for he did not know, but he was thinking of A-Ina. La Salle had already turned away as if sickened.

McGuire had asked for something to eat; and a boy now brought him an opened can of salmon, three biscuits and a mug of cold coffee. He sat on the main-hatch and ate the salmon from the can with a spoon. All about him men were rushing and pattering, excited, fierce.

Delaney stood in the whale-boat that had been lifted off the deck-house and was being lowered over the side. When it touched water it was filled with men who took a hawser that was bent to the capstan and towed the *Islander* so as to hold her to a course that would keep her as much as possible behind the islet foliage until she had crept in almost upon the *Jack and Jill*. A man in the bows of the whale-boat cast the lead.

Presently Williams came to the hatch where McGuire, having eaten, had stretched himself out, with arms extended.

"All right, McGuire. We are leaving."

He sat up instantly, lifting the rifle that was beside him.

"Now remember, McGuire. If possible, we must have Fellowe and Mathers alive."

"Yes, skipper."

The *Islander* was brought to anchor.

Williams had a crew of eight natives, McGuire, Delaney, seven men from Bakari, not including the two in his crew, nine Kingsmill islanders. They were to meet something above forty men; but had they been twice as many it would have been the same.

The whale-boat was off a New Bedford whaler, for which Williams had exchanged a pearl; and for which he would not have taken ten pearls of the same value. There was never a better boat made, though it was only like one of thousands, light, strong, sea-worthy to the point of the miraculous, and would, by cramming them in, hold thirty men.

Williams left La Salle and two of the crew on the *Islander*.

The rowers gave way in silence. Delaney pulled the bow oar; there were two men at each of the other oars. Williams, standing, held the tiller.

They crept in unseen and reached the

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islet to which McGuire had first swum the night before. Then Williams went on shore for a few minutes and peered through the foliage. There were many men on the *Jack and Jill*, and on the beach others were entering two boats to come off to the schooner, which was being made ready to come out with the tide now at the flood.

He returned to the whale-boat, told McGuire to take the tiller and himself climbed into the bow.

"Lay her alongside, McGuire."

"Aye, aye, skipper. Give *way!*"

The oars struck, once, twice, three times, before the boat seemed to come to life. The men who were not rowing were faced forward and lurched their bodies with every stroke, as if driving her on; and all were silent except for the propulsive grunt-like heave of the rowers as they lay back with a throbbing jerk to their oars.

They were seen from deck. There was a rush to the rail. Then a scattering with cries and shouts, a yelling and signaling to the men that were just leaving the beach.

The tide had barely turned, so that the schooner rode stern on to the whale-boat. Men opened fire from the *Jack and Jill's* deck. Bullets *whanged* overhead, struck the water with spiteful *putts*, tossing up tiny blobs as if flipped by a thumb under the surface.

Areko, kneeling, fired alongside Williams' thigh, from behind. A man in front of Delaney suddenly sprawled forward against him as if in a drunken caress. With the swing of an elbow Delaney shoved the dead body aside and did not lose his stroke. Another native, shot through the belly, leaped overboard as if leaving a spring-board. The bullets rained in. Only the frantic excitement of the men on the schooner who, as untrained natives always do, fired almost blindly, eager to shoot, saved those in the whale-boat from being slaughtered as they howled defiance and blazed away.

Williams stood upright in the bow, like a target figure-head. He was not being brave, he was simply being natural. At fifty yards he drew his revolver, but fired only once. That was at Fellowe, who had been taking another loaded rifle as soon as he emptied one; and when Williams shot, Fellowe reeled back with his hand to his breast.

The men on the schooner were not having everything their own way, for the Kingsmill Islanders were good riflemen, and took the second's pause that gives a bullet its sting.

"Drop your oars!" McGuire shouted seeing that the boat had enough way on her to flash alongside.

Delaney flung his oar into the water. The boat was too full of men to waste time trying to get it inboard, and twisting around, shot once.

McGuire wiped the blood from his face where a bullet had nipped his cheek, and leaning far over to see ahead of the men who were standing, brought the boat as true as a well-aimed arrow under the schooner's port-bulwarks.

Williams sprang, one hand clutching the rail, and hung for a moment suspended, feet loose, his revolver in the other hand blazing up at the two men that had leaned over to beat him down. They fell back, dead. He leaped to the deck, shot again, and with knife out, jumped to meet the shaken natives, who half-hesitated whether to fight or swim.

At the same time, all along the rail, men were scrambling overboard from the boat. Delaney roared and rushed, knife in one hand, clubbed gun in the other. Areko had thrown aside his gun and hacked with the sword of shark's teeth. It was deadly work and quick. The natives on board, with Fellowe down, and seeing their numbers equalled by men ten times more ferocious than themselves, began plunging overboard and swimming off for the two boats that, having been beaten in the race for the ship, now hung off and fired at random.

The deck was cleared in two minutes of fighting. The Bakari men fought like demons; and the Kingsmill men hacked, hewed and stabbed the living and the dead.

The whale-boat was adrift. Every man that could move had scrambled out of it; but it floated away from the side of the *Islander* and toward the channel that led to the sea. McGuire looked around. The fight was won, but the natives were filled with blood-madness, and dashed about, yelling horribly, shooting at men in the water, cutting to pieces the wounded. They were savages and fought with savages. Fellowe had been the only white on deck. McGuire knew that it would be easier to go after the boat himself than to get one of the natives to stop in the midst of victory. So he dived overboard and swam for it.

Fellowe, with a hole in his breast, had

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cursed and struck his natives to make them rush at the rail and meet the boarders; but at almost the moment Williams came on the deck a rifle bullet had taken Fellowe in the thigh, knocking him down. He writhed about, cursing.

Williams bent to him, and was struck in the face by Fellowe's fist.

"Get away, you blasted cannibal!" Fellowe yelled.

Williams straightened up with hand out just in time to keep the little old Ghobau from breaking in Fellowe's head with a gun-butt.

"No Ghobau! We save this man!"

"Save me! Save me!" Fellowe snarled huskily. "You go to ——!"

He had worked his left hand to his sheath-knife and struck at Williams like a wounded snake.

Williams, hitting down with the muzzle of his revolver, struck Fellowe's wrist so that the knife dropped from his fingers; then with his foot Williams kicked the knife across the deck, at the same time glancing fore and aft. The fight was won. It had been easy.

"Why the —— did you save me?" Fellowe gasped fiercely.

"The *Good Shepherd!*"

Fellowe's mouth, fringed with blood foam, opened stupidly.

"How'd you know that!"

"Mathers."

Fellowe cursed and cursed, gasping, hoarse and coughing, he cursed; but only Mathers. Then he laughed. He was thinking of Willerby, of the look that would come on Willerby's face. In the midst of death agony it struck him—the stupid, gaping, astounded fear that would flash on that big soft face.

Then Williams heard Delaney's cry, a shout of anger and agony—

"Hurri-cane Williams, come here—come *here!*"

Delaney's back was to him, and the big Irishman was stooping over on the far side of the skylight. It sounded not unlike the cry that Delaney might make if he were dying; that is, if Delaney cried out at such a time.

In a moment Williams was bending beside him.

"Here, see what they 'av' done to her! Ow God! See what they 'av' done!"

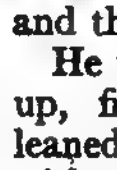
A-Ina sat on the deck where Delaney, having found her in the cabin, had carried her up and placed her. She did not know him. All the senses that gave her alarm were deadened. The yelling and shooting and fighting could not disturb the idiotized child. She sat awkwardly, mouth adroop, eyes that moved about but saw nothing. Her face was swollen, purplish, with scabs of dried blood on the forehead. Something like the effort at a smile trembled under the slack lips, but she was not looking at Delaney. She was looking at the blade of a knife on the deck. Its glitter attracted her.

Delaney straightened, swelling his huge chest, and with half-groan and half-snarl turned away, his eyes filled with a glittering fire.

Williams stooped, touched A-Ina's head, spoke to her. She gaped at him for a second and did not understand. Her eyes went back to the shimmer of the blade.

Then Williams turned and looked toward Fellowe. He was dead—his head was gone.

IX



McGUIRE, when he had climbed into the whale-boat, found that two of the men in the boat were dead and the third was unconscious.

He unlashed the spare oars and standing up, fisherman fashion, facing the bow, leaned against them. A thirty-foot boat with two fourteen-foot oars was hard for a man of McGuire's light weight to manage. He was only about one hundred feet from the schooner, but the tide was against him. McGuire looked around at the dead bodies, hesitated, then shipped his oars.

"Three hundred pounds of dead weight," he said quietly.

It was as if he explained gently to the corpses. McGuire was sensitive in a strange way about some things.

There was a swirl in the water and the second body was almost jerked from his hands as he slipped it over; then a flash and splash, and he saw that sharks were swarming about. Chills ran up and down his body.

He again leaned to his oars, struggling an inch at a time, with that unhurried, persistant, unyielding patience that gave everything he did an air of laziness. The boat moved sluggishly, but it moved.

He became aware of shouts and a new commotion on the deck. At first he thought

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the two boat-loads of men were trying to board the ship from the other side. Then he saw one of the boats come into view, its rowers beating the water. They were trying to get out to sea; or it may have been that Mathers knew the *Islander* would be somewhere along the channel, and practically unguarded; or it may have been merely the impulse to flee along the course that seemed opened.

They knew that the sea at its worst was better than the beach where they would have been harried into the bush by Williams, speared, clubbed and hunted down by the infuriated Bakarians. It was one thing to rush on shore with rifles and burn a village, slaughtering right and left; it was another to wander about, fighting for days, attacked at night, given no rest by the natives and no mercy. Already the sounds of fighting had drawn many of the Bakari natives — they had sneaked tenaciously about their ruined village, never going far off, hoping for a chance at the raiders—to the edge of the bush where they were wildly excited by the knowledge that Williams had returned. But their canoes were destroyed.

The *Jack and Jill* carried but two boats, and both of these were filled with men, too full for fast movement because natives that had been driven from the deck had swum to them.

McGuire saw instantly that the whale-boat must be filled and give chase; but he had not realized any sooner than the people on the schooner, who had crowded with a rush to the side.

"Sharks! Sharks!" he shouted, heaving against the oars.

A native leaped, another, another. One swimmer hardly touched the water before he was jerked under.

"Sharks! Stay back, Pat!"

"—— the sharks!" Delaney yelled, and plunged.

He came on with great, overhand strokes, rolling from side to side, his head under water, arms and feet splashing. That was perhaps what saved him. A second native was pulled under, but Delaney and the other, Soba, reached the whale-boat. Delaney jerked the oars from McGuire's arms and lay against them, McGuire and Soba helping.

The men in the boat fired at them, trying to stop them; but they fired from a distance, and were themselves under fire. Williams stood at the taffrail, shooting rapidly, taking a loaded gun from somebody's hand as he handed back an empty. Areko, almost at his elbow, was doing the same.

As the whale-boat came under the stern, men began dropping into it; and when ten men were in, Williams said to shove off, calling to the others to remain. Old Ghobau made a flying jump and struck on top of a man. But neither was hurt, for Ghobau weighed no more than a monkey.

All that Williams wanted was to get hold of Mathers and to keep the *Islander* from being boarded; so, though the other boat was nearer they set out for the one in which Mathers could be seen.

Though the Willerby natives were armed with rifles they had used up practically all of the ammunition taken on shore with them that day. When they knew that it was about time to return to the ship, the holiday ended, the sport over, they had banged away recklessly at anything and everything; and now many a man among them with an empty rifle wished that he had the shells wasted in aimless firing. Hunting had not been good that day because the Bakari natives had not been surprized or caught off guard.

When it was seen that William was making for the boat that Mathers was in, the other turned aside and started off up the lagoon that reached far inland and was dotted every few hundred yards, and closer, with islets. They disappeared behind an islet and were not seen again from the *Jack and Jill;* but there could be no doubt as to their ultimate fate. They would never be given rest by the savage villages all through the deep lagoon until they were exterminated—not because of any clan friendship with Bakari, but because they were strangers.

At the beginning of the chase the pursued boat was close to two hundred yards off with some fifteen men in it where ten would have been crowded; and they soon saw that the whale-boat would overtake them. They began fighting among themselves. The Malaita natives, being much the stronger, tomahawked and threw over the three or four natives of Teakumigo.

Mathers could he heard above the yelling and howls; he was howling himself, calling on them to row harder. He tugged at an oar, pulling frantically, desperate with a great fear. He would have had his head

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split and been thrown over himself except that he was at an oar. The Malaita men were throwing over their own wounded.

When they came in sight of the *Islander* a yell went up; a yell with savage hope in it. But the two natives that Williams had left on board, disappointed at having missed the fight, opened fire. They rested their guns on the rail and shot, if not coolly at least with the care that put the bullets so close that those in the boat did not want to be nearer, and they sheered off; fleeing—just fleeing, without hope.

La Salle stood on the deck-house, watching. He was flushed with uneasy excitement, tense, and he could not help the feeling that the pursued men ought to escape. Nature herself may be careless of men's lives, so that at every wave of cold they sicken and die like flies, at every wave of heat like plants in a drought; and all know that sooner or later all must die, but there is no thing that holds such a tense uneasy thrill for those who live as in the watching of others who are about to die.

The whale-boat followed with long, sweeping strokes. McGuire was at the tiller, Williams stood just before him, Delaney swayed powerfully to and fro above the bow oar, while each of the other oars, gripped by four hands, pulled to his stroke. In the calm water of the lagoon, riding with the tide, the boats were fast driven.

When the pursued boat swerved to avoid the firing from the ship, it left a curve in its wake that the whale-boat cut across with a straight line.

"Stop shooting!" Williams had said to his natives, though the Malaita men continued to fire sparingly at them. He did not want Mathers killed.

At seventy yards Williams however took the rifle from a man and knocked from the boat the one native in it, who growing bold at not having his bullets returned, had stood up and begun to shoot rapidly.

The men in the pursued boat now stopped shooting, too, and were silent; they were doomed, and knew it. The uneven, frantic jerking of the rowers gave their boat a waggling motion. Their black faces gaped with sullen fear. The natives in the whale-boat yelped and taunted triumphantly as they struggled over one another, crowding to the bows, gesturing wildly, rocking the boat, causing it to lose way. But the end was certain.

At fifty yards Mathers suddenly dropped his oar and sprang up with his hands in the air. He knew that there was such a thing as mercy between white men.

Instantly a Malaita savage split his head with a tomahawk, and he toppled over, lying on the gunnel; then was pushed into the water.

With Mathers's oar gone the boat sheered. McGuire leaned against the tiller, veering slightly to take the other boat broadside. He gave a warning shout, and the boats struck. The more strongly built whale-boat, smashed, splintered, over-rode and almost instantly sank the other; but just as it struck the savages had leaped from it.

Partly by the jar and partly by the frenzy to reach an enemy, little old Ghobau with tomahawk upraised went through the air and came down on the back of a man. They sank together, and did not come up. Sharks had followed the boats. The natives began shooting. Swimmers who dived to escape bullets did not return to the surface. Patches of blood fringed and dotted with air bubbles appeared, drifting on with the tide of the sea.

X

WHEN Williams returned to the *Jack and Jill*, having stopped at the *Islander*, La Salle went with them in the whale-boat. He sat silently, very depressed, looking at the water. It had seemed brutal, vicious slaughter to him. He felt something very like hate for Williams; and could not understand how he had ever liked McGuire. Neither Williams nor McGuire tried to talk to him. Delaney pulled mechanically, with averted face, at the oar.

La Salle had the impression that their consciences were disturbed; and this somewhat intensified his own feeling that they ought to be ashamed. With his own eyes he had seen their cruelty. McGuire could never again defend them, talk of savagery, and of how Williams was misjudged. La Salle had seen.

He was going to the village to gather his few belongings, his specimens that he had left drying, and packed; his orchids, wrapped in moss and carefully placed on a shelf under the eaves outside of the house, to dry in the shade and out of the rain.

La Salle did not get out when the boat

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stopped at the *Jack and Jill* where, in the two or three little fishing canoes that had been found undestroyed, natives from the beach had come and others from the schooner had gone ashore.

The fighting had been severe on Williams's men. Half of his own crew was either killed or so wounded that they would die. There were but five, where there had been nine of the Kingsmill Islanders. Two of these had gone into the fight already wounded. Only Marugi and one other of the men from the village that had gone to Willerby Island were left; and Marugi had already gone ashore.

When Delaney, grumbling in curses, like a man partially out of his head, returned from the *Jack and Jill* and sat down heavily in the whale-boat to wait, La Salle looked inquiringly from him to McGuire.

"Just be patient, be patient, La Salle. You'll learn what's the matter."

La Salle said nothing. He did not at all like McGuire's tone. There was in it even a suggestion of ironic reproach.

Presently all about the ship there was the cracking of glass, and the strong smell of liquor. Williams, having no use for the *Jack and Jill* was going to permit the natives to loot her; but first all the whisky and gin must be destroyed, and if it was merely thrown overboard the natives would dive for it when he had gone.

Men came to the whale-boat and lowered cases of stores, tobacco and tinned stuff, and such trade goods as Mathers had been bringing to Willerby's plantation.

When the boat was filled Williams came into it, and the whale-boat went to the beach.

There La Salle found many of the natives, but they did not notice him. They wandered about or stood aimlessly.

"First you must take a look at this," said McGuire, putting his hand firmly on La Salle's arm and leading up the beach toward something that gradually looked less and less like a pile of coconuts.

He caught a stench. He jerked back.

"No, La Salle. You must see this. Come on."

The skin on the faces was withered, but not out of recognition. La Salle made out the countenance of one after another. There were small heads, now with faces ghastly aged; and some were women's heads; and he stared with fascinated horror until suddenly he recognized Tam's features.

He turned away and walked off rapidly, hurrying through the deep sand, McGuire at his heels.

They went up into the bush, and found nothing but ashes where there had been houses. The living trees were scorched; withered and burned branches hung motionless overhead like the foliage of an accursed land.

La Salle found the ashes of his house, and nothing else. His tin boxes had been opened, and what was in them thrown about. What had not been destroyed had been looted, or spoiled.

It was growing late in the afternoon. The shadows lay on the ground like dead things with weight in their bodies. Far off women were wailing. Sometimes a lone man drifted by sadly as if lost in a strange country.

"Terrible. Terrible, McGuire," La Salle said quietly.

"Yes, but not so bad as you think. Most of the fighting men are left, and if any of their neighbors come in thinking to have easy work of finishing them off they will find themselves heading into a swarm of angry hornets—with a lot of rifles. Williams doesn't like to give arms to natives, but something must be done for friends. He is leaving them food and trade goods, and two boats from the *Islander*. It doesn't take long to build a house, and their gardens will grow again. A year from now you would never know. What they have done to this village is nothing more than Bakari time and again has done to other villages. 'Tis the law of savage places."

"If I had known this I would not have stayed on the schooner," La Salle said quietly.

"I knew that, too."

"Tam! McGuire, I liked that boy."

"He would have done the same to a hundred men, and boasted of it."

"Life is a horrible thing, McGuire. I don't understand it. Savages murder one another, and civilized people grind one another to pieces. Insects and fishes feed on one another; even flowers do best if they put their roots down into something that has died."

"You know more of that than I."

"Tell me again, McGuire. The truth, this time. What *has* happened to Doris?"

He looked hard at McGuire, his muscles braced to meet any words, believe anything.

"I don't know," said McGuire.

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"What do you think? I understand now why her mother was so afraid. I thought her crazy, but she knew only too well."

It was night before the *Jack and Jill* was stripped. Williams took only such gear as needed; and when the tide had turned the *Islander* was brought in closer to make the transfer more easy.

La Salle joined in the work, at first merely giving a hand here and there, but presently sweating and struggling beside natives. Every time he caught sight of Delaney he wondered at the great Irishman's sullenness and strength. He heaved and threw in silence, with the strength of many men, as if in a bitter anger. La Salle did not yet know that the tomahawk that went into Mathers' head had cheated Delaney of the only thing in life that he wanted, and that it would be many weeks before Delaney would laugh; then with an edge of bitterness.

In the dimness of the evening A-Ina was brought to the *Islander;* and Delaney, holding her hand, started with her to the cabin. Eventually she would be taken to Samoa, and left in a village there where the natives, with just a little awe in their manner, would wait on her.

La Salle came up to greet her, and spoke. She did not look toward him. She was pulling back against Delaney's hand, her head turned.

"What's the matter?" asked La Salle.

"The matther?" Delaney answered savagely. "Look yez into her face—that's the matther?"

He turned her around, and La Salle saw.

He drew back, his throat suddenly dry and pinched. Words struggled up—

"Those savages!"

"Ow yis, savages! 'Twas Mathers, or Fellowe, Rand 'r Willerby—they're all ov a br-r-reed!"

"But Doris, my God, Doris — they wouldn't have——"

"An' who 'ud sthop 'em? They're all ov a br-r-reed, Oi tell yez!"

And he passed on, leading the idiot girl.

CHAPTER V

I

THE *Islander* stood out to sea the next morning. The wind was light. Delaney paused at work to glower at the lazy sails and throw muttered oaths to windward.

Everybody was working, storing away gear, cleaning up about the deck; and La Salle walked about moodily, staring, trying to keep out of the way.

Twice he had approached Williams to talk of the girl; but Williams declined to talk. It was if he had no words to waste, and the half-fearful pleasure of idle worry was something that he did not permit himself. To La Salle he seemed unchanged, as if his face was made of metal.

"What will he do?" La Salle asked of McGuire.

McGuire shook his head.

"What can he do?"

Again McGuire shook his head; then—

"He will go on until he finds his daughter."

"But supposing it is at sea? They have the bigger ship! The more men! A cannon!"

"Aye, La Salle. And they'll be eager to overhaul us. But you can count on it, they don't expect us. You can count on it, too, that Williams knows just about the course they are on."

"McGuire, I loved that girl."

"Yes, and Williams knows it."

Late in the afternoon Delaney's unorthodox prayers were answered, and it came on a blow. The *Islander* took it with all sail set, her scuppers under, and trembling as if afraid.

"We'll bay waitin' in Valkua f'r 'em," said Delaney.

"But this ship, it looks dangerous," said La Salle, not showing nearly as much uneasiness as he felt.

"The bulwarks may go bayfore mornin', an' things bay smashed up for-r-rad, which'll ownly make her shlip through the water easier."

The *Islander* was a tough schooner. She had gone through many up-and-downs, dodged in-and-out of queer places, sometimes cleared her passage by breaking through coral, taken hard bumps and close shaves, and not always had got the best of care when she needed it, because there were times when she needed to make long jumps between breathing spells; but as ships do she seemed to know what was wanted of her; and with the feel of Williams' hand on the wheel she would crawl closer by a half-point up into the wind than anything in the South Seas that did not have a smoke-stack.

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All through the night there was crashing and pounding. La Salle could not sleep. It was not fear, except at times the fearful thought that if something happened they would have to give up the chase. He came on deck many times during the night and each time saw Williams standing on the slanting deck; standing alone, holding to nothing, facing windward or peering ahead.

The next morning they sighted land to starboard; by evening they sighted land to port; but none of the men who had relieved one after the other at the masthead threw down word of a sail.

"There bay toime. There bay plenthy ov toime," said Delaney.

II

AT SUN-RISE two days later McGuire pointed away to a glistening speck almost abeam, and taking the wheel from Soba told him to bring up the telescope.

The crew with merry clatter was washing down the deck. The sloshed water spread with the crisp, singing sizzle of foam and scratch of brushes.

Soba came up with the glass. McGuire braced it against a backstay and stared for a full minute or two, then ran up the rigging from where he looked carefully, and longer. He climbed down, his eyes thoughtfully on the sheen of the distant sails.

With the glass under his arm he started below, then stepped back for A-Ina to come out of the companionway entrance. She was making a queer foolish sound, as if trying to sing, and passed without noticing him.

McGuire went down into the cabin. It was almost as bare as the day the schooner had scooted from the ways; but it was clean. "Scrubbingly clean," McGuire called it. The deck was bare. There was an enormous iron-bound chest fastened at the forward-bulkhead beside the pantry door and a rifle rack around the mizzen; four low, heavy, teak chairs, and a table that could be swung out of the way overhead were the only furniture.

The door into Williams' room was open. He sat at a small desk that was fastened to the bulkhead, pencil in hand and chart before him.

In the more idle, odd moments he worked up the notes and observations gathered from wherever he had been, so that at his fingers' end, if not even closer than that, at the back of his head, he had facts and figures that every prowler among the islands would have thanked him for.

He sat, bending slightly, with the left arm lying straight out on the desk, and the hand was clenched as if choking something.

"Skipper?"

Williams stopped penciling, but did not look up.

"Skipper, there's a bark on the port tack, right abeam."

Williams pushed back the armless chair, and standing up finished the line that he was writing. He took the offered glass—reached out and took it without seeming to look to see if it were there. That was the accurate unnoticing way that he did many things.

He went on deck, McGuire following.

After a long glance through the glass, Williams lowered it as if he could see better unaided. Feet apart, and holding the telescope in one hand by the small end as if it were a club, he stared.

The *Islander* was lying over on the starboard tack, going through the water with long bounding rise and fall. The air was fresh, with a Springtime warmth in it, as is the way with the early morning in tropic seas; and the flaky crest of the waves was not unlike the drifting of May blossoms in an apple orchard. It was the sort of morning that makes seamen mad enough to love the old, salt-watery waste better than anything on land.

Presently all eyes were turned toward the bark, whose top-sails could now clearly be seen. Ordinarily there is much about one ship sighting another in the lonely spaces of the sea which is like the passing nod of a secret brotherhood in a far country, but now there was a hopeful anger in the eyes of the men that watched, and a tense staring.

"Do you think that is her?" La Salle asked McGuire.

"See that canvas?" McGuire pointed to the black sails on the *Islander*. "The skipper had 'em bent so she would know us as far as we could see her. Usually they're to help us out in the night-time. If she tries to overhaul us, it'll be her."

But soon McGuire went to the masthead with the glass, and returned almost at once.

"That's her," he said to Williams.

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Williams nodded slightly without looking around.

Inside of an hour they could see that the bark, having altered her course slightly, was making for them. The *Neptune* leaned over with the wind well on her quarter. The head-sails marbled out, and she carried a sweep of canvas aloft. Her yards were braced in, and the main and foresail were great patches of swollen canvas. She came like a yacht on her course, lifting and charging with the pride of life in her. Narrow of beam, trim and sharp, with an upward bend of bow that gave her an air of gracefulness as the foam boiled along her side.

She had the weather-gage of the *Islander*, and was charging down as if conscious of triumph.

Those on the *Neptune* may have been mystified as to why the *Islander* did not turn and run for it; or they may have satisfied themselves with the explanation that no one of Williams's men but McGuire had seen the *Neptune*—and perhaps McGuire was not on board. Anyway, she had nothing to fear; and here was the "pirate," ready to be taken on the high seas.

The *Neptune* had every advantage, unless a squall came along and dismasted her; but it was a clear, sweet day, and the sky rippled with clouds soft and downy and no bigger than cherubs' wings.

From the *Islander* they could see men along the *Neptune's* rail, staring away, perhaps with wonder; certainly with a feeling of gleeful assurance.

Williams had scarcely moved from the time that the bark was sighted, except to give orders that brought the schooner up closer into the wind; but now, turning away to go below, he spoke in a low voice, with almost indifference in the tone, as if thinking of something else all the while.

"Take the wheel, McGuire—and stand by to ram her."

"Aye, aye, skipper," said McGuire to the vanishing back.

Then with a lazily exaggerated air of unconcern he walked to the wheel, though his heart for once felt as if it were doing flippety-flops instead of beating.

"Get away, get away Soba—" he gestured as if shooing him off— "go up forward an' say your prayers—say some for me, too!"

McGuire hooked an arm around a spoke and reached for a hard twist of tobacco. He bit on it with deliberate slowness, put the tobacco carefully into a hip-pocket, and patted the pocket to make sure that it was carefully stowed. He pulled his cap low, grasping the wheel with both hands, took a long glance forward at the head sails, then stared across to the *Neptune*.

III

ARMS were placed about the deck, out of sight from those who watched through glasses from the *Neptune;* and the order, very emphatically given, was no one was to be shot unless offering resistence.

"Oi 'm guessin' thot we av a foine bark under our feet bafore this day is done," said Delaney to La Salle.

"It is madness," said La Salle.

"It is thot. An' we bay a mad lot this day."

Williams came on deck. La Salle regarded him with renewed interest. His body was black as weathered bronze, his face tense, his eyes hard and apparently noticing nothing. He wore only a sheath-knife at his belt; and, naked to the waist, carried a small package roughly done up in coarse yellow paper. In one hand he held an unlighted cigar, gripping it.

La Salle had never seen him smoke.

Williams set the package securely in a space of the brass-grating over the skylight, gave a quick look about the deck, and went forward, walking with long, rapid, noiseless steps.

Areko and two of the Kingsmill Islanders were out of sight, with arms in their hands, in the deck-house forward.

"He looks changed. I can't tell just how," said La Salle to McGuire.

McGuire munched away on the tobacco, thoughtfully. Then with his eyes glancing steadily forward, he asked—

"And you, have you changed any?"

"I am going on board that ship, with the others of you," he said firmly, looking very hard at McGuire.

"It's piracy."

"I know it, McGuire. But—but, McGuire, if they have mistreated *that* girl, I'll be glad to hang when I am done with the brute!"

McGuire's eyes flickered toward him, then went back to the weather-leach.

"Take her below, La Salle. Lock her up."

A-Ina with clumsy slow steps, and mouth

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adroop, had come toward them, her vague eyes on the yellow parcel in the brass grating.

La Salle hesitated.

"Don't let her touch it," McGuire said sharply. "That's dynamite!"

La Salle reached out quickly, catching her hand. He pulled gently, but she held back.

"Quick, La Salle!"

A grayish puff darted from the side of the *Neptune* amid the crack of the six-pounder, and a whistling hiss passed over the bow of the *Islander*.

The natives about the deck shouted from one to another excitedly, with half-merriment. Two or three of them had been with Williams before when shells fell, hot and fast, raining down, on, and around them, as they made for a reef that boiled thunderously; and the gunboat had not dared follow to be wrecked—also.

"Heave to — or — we'll — sink — you — Hurricane Williams!"

That was a faint, long shout from the captain of the *Neptune*.

Williams, returning aft, did not look around. He came to the grating, took up his parcel, and returned forward.

Another white rolling puff, the sharp quick burst of sound, and a shattered hole appeared in the deck-house.

Again the *Neptune* fired as the *Islander* dipped; and the shell left its mark in the foresail, having passed within an arm's reach of where Williams stood.

Williams unrolled an edge of his trousers at the waist-line and from a small rubber pocket took a sulfur match, which he scratched on a dead-eye, and with the preoccupied way of a man getting a light in a wind, sheltered the match in cupped hands. He puffed hard, repeatedly, with no enjoyment, intently watching the end of the cigar come into a glow.

Then he went up in the bow, and stood motionless, glancing from the *Neptune* back along his own deck.

The *Neptune* had come up without shortening sail, heading for the schooner, firing as she came, expecting every moment that the *Islander's* canvas would come clattering down; and she was not a little surprized to find shouts and shots accepted inattentively.

Suddenly on board the *Neptune*, when scarcely more than a pistol's-shot off, they saw what was happening. The *Islander* did not intend to heave to—she was standing for a collision!

Amid a flurry of movement among those on deck, and the fierce bawling of orders, the *Neptune* put down her helm, doused the headsails and foresails, let everything go by the run, and came around almost astern of the *Islander* as she shot by under a sprinkling of lead and the burst of the six-pounder.

The *Islander* had narrowly missed ramming.

Two men, plainly seen to be Willerby and Terry Rand, in yachting caps, blue coats, white trousers, fired rapidly with revolvers across the stern of the *Neptune;* and two men with rifles added to their fire.

Delaney answered the shots with waving fists and ferocious shouts. Men jeered him from the *Neptune's* rail. La Salle yelled angrily. For a minute it was like a wind-scattered babble of voices, orders, cries, threats, amid the sharp whang and snap of small arms. Not a shot was fired from the *Islander*.

And for that minute these guns *crack-cracked* at a range murderously like point-blank.

A young Samoan sailor threw up his arms and whirled with the spinning leap of a man who tries to dodge a bullet after it had entered his brain. Soba went down, writhing like a wounded dog. Delaney caught the angry *snick* and *puff* of bullet after bullet as it nipped overhead or struck woodwork near by. A warm glow came from behind into McGuire's right shoulder.

The *Islander* passed with a rush to windward. Then Williams shouted, his words flying like blows, and a bustling stir swarmed over the deck as men fought the booms, hauling them inboard.

McGuire pulled at the wheel, grinding it down, lips drawn back, teeth clenched, fighting to swing her over; but his whole right side seemed numb. Somehow, half his weight seemed gone. He called to a native, and the fellow leaped to his side, hanging his weight on the spokes.

Minutes seemed to pass, and did pass. Men gripped sheets and braces, waiting with frozen intentness.

Slowly, reluctantly, stubbornly as if the devil himself were holding her, the *Islander* came into the wind and paid off, turning with the wary deliberation that ships have at the time of a tricky crisis.

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At last she came around until the wind was almost astern.

Williams shouted again, his voice like the burst of a shell.

With a rush and a bang that nearly tore things loose, she gibed and hung motionless for a moment in a startled shiver while the seamen on board her held their breath.

Then with a smooth, slow glide that ended in a plunge the *Islander*, having craftily turned on her heels, made straight for the *Neptune*.

She now lay all aback in an excited mess and clutter. The crew had stopped too long to gape at the *Islander's* puzzling maneuver until, when it was no longer puzzling, they were in too much of a frantic hurry to get their bark before the wind. Partly because of the stubbornness that is in her sex, the *Neptune* sullenly refused to swing off, no matter how far around they hauled the yards, swung the boom, hauled the headsails, or cursed the helmsman. Everybody was giving orders, yelling, hauling. But they were caught.

Panicky amazement flashed on them. That a smaller vessel, with fewer men and no arms in sight should seek a collision was unnatural. The crew of the *Neptune*, seeing that they were taken aback, suddenly rushed to the rail, looking over, staring, puzzled by dread of what they felt even more than by what they saw, for the men of the *Islander* were motionless at stations about the deck, empty-handed, staring too, watching as if wondering.

Williams was up in the bows, alone. La Salle had come to him, and been told to stand away.

Williams climbed out on the bowsprit. More than half-naked, the dynamite under his arm, the cigar between his teeth, he stood waiting, while the *Islander* plunged and rose. He seemed as balanced as if his feet were riveted through the high sway and long fall of the bowsprit.

A thick-faced man, Captain Mason, reached around the davits of the *Neptune's* port-quarter boat and opened fire at Williams with a revolver. Sailors, thinking he was about to board them, swayed forward to beat him off.

From under his arm he took the parcel, tore it open with his teeth, and having puffed at the half-gone cigar, touched its glow to the frayed end of a short fuse. Throwing away his cigar he turned toward his own deck and shouted—

"Let go—all!"

Instantly there was the fluttering crack and shiver of loosened sail as it came down; and men ran about, snatching up their arms, firing, shouting.

Delaney leaped forward into the bows that were driving straight for the *Neptune's* port-bow. The fuse sizzled viciously, but Williams held it, his eye on it, timing it; then with a shout that carried like a wind-blow shout from a trumpet—

"Stand clear—dynamite!" he threw the weighted bomb.

Those who had seen the spluttering fuse knew what was coming and led a helter-skelter dodging along the deck, shouting half-finished words.

As it touched the deck the bomb exploded, the ear-racking burst was, somehow, much more wicked of sound and instantaneous than gun-fire.

A half-second later the *Islander's* iron-bound stump bow-sprit drove glancingly at the *Neptune's* side, ripping out a gash before she sank in; then the *Islander's* bow struck with a jar like a second explosion, and the next instant Williams was on the *Neptune's* deck, with Delaney at his heels, La Salle following, climbing from bowsprit to bulwarks; Areko and his savages scrambled up; and McGuire, with a hole in his back, so that all of one side seemed numb, rushed along the deck and was helped by a native seaman to climb the *Neptune's* rail.

So it was that Willerby was boarded on the high seas.

IV

THREE or four of the *Neptune's* crew were in the water. Some had been knocked away and some had jumped, helped to go by the shock and the feeling that the bark had been split under their feet.

Confusion swept the *Neptune* like a blizzard blast. The forward deck-house was knocked apart like a match-box struck by a fist, and a great patch of deck, starboard of the foremast, was blown away. The foremast was splintered from pin-rail to foot, and swaying jerkingly aback in the wind, with starboard stays snapped, fell along the side to port, her yards crashing down on the *Islander*, as if grasping and

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pinning the schooner to her. Broad on the starboard-bow the side was shattered almost to the water-line. If her fallen mast had lain to starboard it would have pulled her over until the hole in her side shipped seas like a nicked soup plate.

The officers yelled and shot. Some of the men made a rush for a quarter-boat, but jammed the falls, then fell away, scattered by the rush of yelling natives from the *Islander*.

Two Fijian sailors were killed instantly; one wounded Fijian leaped into the water and began swimming desperately as if for land that lay beyond the horizon.

Willerby shrieked and shot.

"Ah stop it! You make me sick'" Terry Rand snarled at him, suddenly disgusted by the panicky fear of a man he had secretly despised though he spent his money, drank his wine, and lived with him like a brother.

When Willerby's revolver had clicked time and again on dead shells, he cast a wavering glance from right to left, rushed to the taffrail, but drew back from the water, then plunged down the companionway to the deck below.

Terry Rand knew that this was the end, and he saved his shells, sheltering himself at the side of the wheel-house, resting his revolver, shooting slowly with savage coolness.

Delaney had rushed straight into the muzzle of the mate's leveled revolver, took the bullet through the fleshy part of his neck up near the jaw, as if it was no more than a pin prick, then drove his knife through flesh and ribs into the man's side.

La Salle had grappled with Hornabuck who was beating him down with blow on blow across the head with the muzzle of his emptied gun; then Delaney fell on Hornabuck, jerked him back, smashed him to the deck, stamped on him as on an insect, and whirled like a charging bull.

Williams, pressing aft, half-dropped, crouching low for the flash of a second as Captain Mason fired pointblank, then leaped with swing of his knife's hilt on the side of the head and laid Mason to the deck. Williams bent and snapped a question, but Mason could not hear. He was unconscious. Williams went on.

Nothing could touch Williams, and all that he carried was a knife in his left hand. Men struck at him, shot at him. He seemed invulnerable as a fantom, and seemed to know it. He sprang at two white sailors in a passageway aft by the deck-house, shoved rather than knocked them right and left, and rushed by. He was searching for but one thing.

Terry Rand, crouching at the side of the wheel-house, saw him come. He fired once and missed, twice and missed. With a curse he straightened up, and fired a third time, but his arm had been struck down from behind with a blow that was meant for his head and hit his shoulder. Rand wheeled, but McGuire, with one arm useless, dropped his empty rifle which was too heavy for quick work as a club and snatched claw-like at Rand's wrist. The bullet passed within an inch of McGuire's cheek where there was yet the scab of another bullet's mark.

They clenched. McGuire snapped his teeth into Rand's neck, holding on. His right arm was numb, his left hand gripped the wrist that held the gun. Williams, without even noticing that he had been fired at, sprang down the companion.

They struggled in behind the wheel-house, with Rand cursing as a cat spits. The shouting about the deck forward told them that the fighting was over, the *Neptune* taken. Rand wrenched and jerked, maddened to shake him off. But McGuire had forgot his life, he remembered only the *Good Shepherd* and A-Ina. They lunged, twisted, staggered, bumped from taffrail to wheel-house and back again. They could hear shouts and the running of men before the companion. In another moment somebody would be sure to see or hear them.

"I'm gone but you go with me, —— you!" Rand screamed, and with a lunge against the taffrail, toppled over, clenching McGuire to him, holding him, pulling him down; and they fell into the water.

Instinct is stronger than hate. As they hit the water, Rand's grip relaxed for an instant, for only an instant but that was enough. Rand could swim, but McGuire was like an eel and almost as much at his ease under water. As they fell, McGuire gulped a breast full of air; as they struck he let go of Rand's wrist and seized his hair; as they sank, McGuire thrust down Rand's head, locking it between his legs and squeezed. Down they sank, with Rand clawing and beating, but McGuire lay easily in the water, teeth clenched and eyes shut, stroking with one arm to resist the buoyancy of the water that would have swung

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them up. His lungs ached, his ears throbbed but he held on until he felt Rand's hands lose force as they tore at his legs.

"I don't want to drown him," said McGuire to himself, remembering the *Good Shepherd* and that Mathers and Fellowe were dead.

Then he began stroking to rise to the surface, but he saw that he could not make it without using his legs.

"He'll come up—then I'll get him," thought McGuire.

He released his grip on Rand's neck and with powerful kick and stroke came to the surface, a hundred feet or more from the bark. No one was in sight. He shouted. No one heard. The sea was running with smooth-crested billows with a strong drift in them. He faced about to watch for Rand. He knew that a drowned man could—or at least by Williams would—be brought to life. Now in the trough of the sea, now on the crest, McGuire gazed at the water. But in that tumbling of waves he could not see far or see what was going on aboard the *Neptune*.

The body might have risen a dozen times, twenty times, within fifty feet and he not have seen it. He had expected it and himself to be seen from the deck; but no one had come to the rail. That was strange. It made him almost uneasy. The drift of the waves was carrying rapidly away from the ships. But from every crest he gazed rapidly around him; then knew that Rand was gone. Even if he did find the body he could do nothing but hold to it, tread water and wait for a boat to be lowered that would pick them up, and by that time Rand would be drowned beyond recovery. Beside, there was the danger of drifting out of sight in that rough sea, and a long swim would not be easy with one arm useless.

So he lay on his side, and slowly, easily, with the swaying rise and fall of the running waves, worked his way back; and the slow turning of the ships as they drifted, locked together, brought the *Islander* around to him.

He saw a wet strange figure on the deck, looking all about uncertainly. Two other men were in the water, holding to ropes that had been cast over the side when the *Neptune's* foremast fell. They were off the *Neptune* and had been knocked or jumped into the ocean, and had swum back.

As McGuire came up they eyed him with hesitating menace.

"It's all right," said McGuire, easily. "The skipper wasn't after anybody but Willerby and——"

One of the white men cursed Willerby. They climbed on the *Islander*. Doubtfully, they helped McGuire; warning him that there was to be no trickery; seeming to feel that in him they had a hostage.

"Let's get back on the bark and see what's going on. Something's wrong."

IV

WAS THEY came on the *Neptune's* deck they saw no one about except such as would never move again.

It was depressing, awful, mysterious. The men with him looked from one another to McGuire. There was no sound but the slap of waves and canvas, the groaning creak of the broken mast as it chafed against the broken bulwarks, and the drip of the water as it fell from them. They went aft.

At the companion McGuire stopped, bending to peer below, then a step at a time, quietly, he went down. The men hesitatingly followed, half-afraid, curious, stealthily as if treading the ladder of a ghost ship.

A strange and strangely silent gathering was below in the large cabin—black men and white, men that a half-hour before had struck to kill one another. Captain Mason with a blackened, swollen face, sat heavily in a chair, and one of his sailors stood behind him in an attitude of awkward uneasiness; Hornabuck, covered with blood, held his hands behind him and his elbows touched the elbows of La Salle, no less splattered with blood, who repeatedly put his hands to his face, pressing them tightly; Areko, savage and erect, rested his arm out at full length, gripping the rifle's barrel; Delaney, his thumbs thrust down into the wide belt of shark's skin, stood with great shoulders squared, and his eyes on the man by his side. This man was Willerby.

He of all those present had no scratch on body or face; his clothes were unruffled, spotless; but his face seemed to have suddenly shrunk, and its color was the color of the ash from a strong cigar. Darkly gray. Almost every second breath was a gasping sigh, and he stared fixedly at the deck.

The cabin was large, with a polished deck for the light feet of the gay dancers that had

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often shuffled merrily across it the night through, dancing, drinking, singing, toasting the merry good fellow, the prince of the Islands—Slade Willerby and his yacht-like bark.

A large piano sat aft of the companion-way. Divans and deep, soft chairs were ranged against the bulkheads. Lamps of bronze swung from the beams. The woodwork was carved and colored, and hangings of heavy, bright cloth hung before the doors of the staterooms, seldom used except for guests.

One of these hangings had been jerked down and trampled on the deck. The door before which it had hung was splintered from being broken into, forced open. The ax lay on the deck.

Willerby had locked himself in. Williams had broken in and brought him out.

Another of the stateroom doors was open, and it was toward this that almost everybody stared.

As McGuire and the sailors descended, some glanced at them, but at once looked away. Every one was waiting, silent, tense.

Williams came from the open doorway. His hands were empty and hung at his side. His face, inflexible as his character, showed nothing; it was hard set, and his eyes as they glanced about the cabin, gleamed in a way that McGuire had never seen, and he had seen them in all their moods of fierceness.

At a word and a gesture, a native and a *Neptune* sailor brought forward a chair, a deep, high-backed, velvet-covered chair, red as the glow of a coal.

Then Williams gestured again, and spoke quietly. They brought forward a couch, covered with yellow brocade; and they placed it in the center of the cabin, in the midst of the group of men that stood and sat and waited.

"Gentlemen—" Williams was looking at Captain Mason, who regarded him with a steady, hostile gaze— "you may say what you please of this day when you have reached your port; but whether you wish it or not, you shall hear and you shall judge!"

Then two of the Kingsmill islanders who had been in the stateroom came out; one walked carefully backward, and between them they carried the body of Doris Stanlea and placed it on the couch covered with yellow brocade. The body was stiff, rigid, it had been dead for twenty hours, but the hilt of a knife remained above the heart.

Lania Du Beque followed slowly. She put aside the hands that reached to support her. She would lean on no one. Her tall body was wrapped in a long silken dressing-gown. Her black hair fell loosely down her shoulders, down the sides of her thin, haggard, ghastly face. Except for the unnatural brightness of her black eyes she looked more like a corpse than the beautiful girl who lay with hands folded and lids closed.

As she had been carried in, Captain Mason gave a start; and when Madame Du Beque appeared he half-rose. He glanced questioningly toward Willerby, but Willerby did not look up. Men broke the silence for a moment with quick breathing and vague mutters. Then the hush was like the silence in a cavern when men await the gloomy mysteries of an enchantress; and Lania Du Beque was tragic in every aspect, paler than the touch of death would make her, tall, haggard and sinister, fiercely poised though dying on her feet.

She disregarded the chair that had been placed for her, and walking to the side of the couch, stopped and slowly extended her arm cried shrilly:

"Slade Willerby killed her. Before my eyes he killed her. With his own hands he killed her!"

"Oh, that's a lie! That's a —— lie!" Willerby cried, glancing up and starting back, his face flushed suddenly. His body trembled, and hands quivered as if with palsy.

"Shut up, ye dog!" Delaney growled, grasping Willerby by the shoulder.

"Last night I lay on my bed and could not move. He came drunk into my room and cursed me while she stood by. I am Lania Du Beque, known to all men, but my daughter did not know. He laughed and cried out my shame from the day when I came from France to Caledonia, following a man that had been deported. He told some things that were true, and some that were false. He came to the name of Clive Stanley then suddenly he started back, cursing. Stanley—Stanlea. He had not thought of that before—and there, there stands Clive Stanley!"

With a sweeping over-hand gesture her arm was leveled at Williams.

Men gasped and shuffled in their astonishment, then were motionless.

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"He called her father every vile name the lips of a devil could utter. He said: 'Her mother a harlot! Her father a pirate! I'll have her now—or kill her.' And he killed her!"

"That's a lie!" Willerby shrieked. "A lie! A lie!"

His hands and body and face squirmed and twisted as if in a spasm.

"That's a lie! A lie I tell you! She killed herself! She held the knife to her breast and ran against a bulkhead! I tried to stop her! Before God, it is the truth!"

Lania Du Beque lifted her arm straight above her head, and looking straight at him said with a strange quietness—

"Before God, it is I who have told the truth!"

V

THE white men muttered, their eyes on Willerby. Williams, beside the daughter he had never known, stood with arms folded, gazing down at her. He did not look up. It was as if he had not heard, was not listening.

Captain Mason arose heavily, looking about him from face to face, repeating brokenly:

"I knew nothing of this. I knew nothing of this."

"Nor I! Nor any man of us!" Hornabuck said loudly.

"No! None of us!" said a white sailor, and others spoke the same.

"He told me the girl was sick—sick," Captain Mason said as if speaking out of a daze.

"Not a man would've lifted an arm to keep you off us!" Hornabuck almost shouted at Williams.

"Aye, not a man!" the sailors repeated as if in a chorus.

"I would have put him in irons, owner that he is!" Captain Mason thundered, driving his fist downward through the air.

Mason was known as a hard case, one of old W. W.'s men; coarse and brutal and reckless, with a long hatred of Williams behind him; but he was not a man to do what he really knew was wrong, though his code might be lax and vague.

Lania Du Beque remained rigidly erect, supported by the strength of vengeance that would not break until satisfied. Her black eyes looked from face to face, searching their thoughts.

Willerby would not look up. He stood in a sullen fear, his fingers opening, closing and twisting about a silk handkerchief.

"One word more and I am done," said Madame Du Beque, again pitching her voice until it rang through the cabin. "For two days I had not been able to stand, but I rose from my bed. I locked the door. I folded her arms, I closed her eyes, and by her side I knelt the whole night through, and when I looked from the window this morning I knew that my prayer was heard! Gentlemen, there is my daughter! There is the man that killed her! Do you believe?"

"Aye!"

"Aye! Aye!"

"The —— dog!"

"We know it!"

"He's the kind that would."

"Aye."

Willerby started up in a sudden rage, thrusting out his fist, crying:

"—— you all! You're fools! She killed herself, I tell you. But what are you going to do about it? You can't kill *me!* When we get to port I'll settle with you, all you —— She said that nobody would make her like that native girl the fool Mathers beat up, and she killed herself. I wouldn't have hurt her. I was just drunk and fooling. And what are you going to do about it!"

From across the body of his daughter Williams spoke slowly—

"Hang you to your own yardarm, now!"

Madame Du Beque cried—

"Oh!" Again, "Oh;" then triumphant, "Oh!"

Her haggard face seemed suddenly aglow, as if with a great peace, as she closed her eyes, lifting her clasped hands above her head, then reeled, moved unsteadily, and dropped beside the couch. Now, at last, she could weep like a broken mother; and her sobbing filled the cabin where men stood aghast, staring at Williams.

Willerby, with his hand at his throat, gasped:

"No! My God, no! You—you don't dare! Mason, Mason! For God's sake! Hornabuck! Men, all you men—don't! I'll give you money—I'll give you anything! All of you—you stand here! Oh, I've been good to you fellows. Mason—Mason!"

Captain Mason started to speak; but the body of Doris Stanlea was before him, placed as Lania had insisted it should be placed before she would enter the cabin.

"Williams, listen. Listen, Williams. I'll

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make you rich, I'll get you pardoned. Williams, there's something you don't know about. The *Good Shepherd*—you didn't do that. I know who did that! I'll have them hanged—all those fellows. Williams——"

"Mathers and Fellowe are dead!"

"And Rand is dead!" said McGuire in little more than a whisper.

"Hang me! Oh my God. You don't—you can't—why, I'm—I'm Slade Willerby. Williams, I can do anything for you, Williams! Before everybody here I swear, Williams, I swear that I'll——"

"On deck with him!"

Williams spoke coldly, with no anger and no mercy.

Delaney grasped him by the collar and jerked.

Willerby shouted and pleaded, he cursed and begged. Froth came on his lips. He screamed that Lania Du Beque had lied, naming her with the evilest of names until men's faces that had been touched with horror for his fate were hardened. He threatened, he struggled, he sobbed. He yelled that Williams would pay for it, and with the same breath begged to turn over everything on earth that he owned for his life. He pleaded to be taken to Sydney, begged for a day, for an hour. He tried to get down on his knees, and struck out insanely at Delaney who jerked and dragged him across the deck, with Willerby crying out for somebody to help him, to save him. He clutched at men who drew back, then remained motionless. He snatched at stanchions, he was pulled dragging a chair with him, he pushed with legs and hands against the companionway.

As he stumbled across the combing he whispered to Delaney—

"Help me out of this—I'll make you rich!"

Delaney did not answer.

"You're thinking how to work it? It's him they are all afraid of. I'll make you captain and put Mason in irons. It's him—kill him and——"

His answer was a back-handed blow in the mouth; and Delaney went on, dragging him.

The men filed up slowly, stumbling, dry of mouth, uneasy.

Captain Mason touched Williams' arm, saying respectfully:

"Old W. W. used to say you were Clive Stanley, but I never believed it. And don't do this thing, Stanley—Williams, whichever it is. I don't blame you, but—he's a swab, but there'll be a terrible row about it. Take him in. We'll all swear——"

"Mason, you and your men will be put ashore at some Samoan village where a trader calls regularly. More than that I have nothing to say to you."

Williams turned away, and went on to the mainmast. He spoke to no one. Taking up a coil of rope he flung it up, and the rope passed between the foot of the sail and the main-yard.

Men pressed back, staring, silent.

Williams measured the rope to the small capstan by the main-hatch. He cut the rope and made an end fast to the capstan; then cut a piece of small line and going to Willerby bound his hands behind him, though Willerby struggled, begged and cursed. Williams took the dangling end of the rope, made a running noose, placed it over Willerby's head, drew the noose snug; then made a short, quick gesture, and Delaney stepped back.

"I have left slack enough in the rope for you to kneel and pray," Williams said and walked to the capstan, where he picked up a capstan-bar and waited.

Willerby dropped to his knees, but instantly jumped up, his arms writhing to tear his hands free. He ran this way and that, madly, till the jerk of the rope, when it tautened, pulled him back. He cried for men to help him, to save him. His voice broke. He shrieked.

Then Williams fitted the bar into the capstan, and leaning against it began to walk, not slowly, not rapidly, his eyes straight before him, and the *click click click* of the capstan kept time to the march of his feet.

VI

WHAT was left of both crews set to work to clear away the hamper from the *Islander* and repair her smashed rigging. Hornabuck and Delaney worked side by side, speaking quietly to the men and not often; and the men spoke not at all except in the lowest of voices.

The *Neptune* was injured beyond repair at sea. Her timbers were started. When the hole in her side came to the weather she shipped sea. She was filling.

That afternoon Doris Stanlea was buried at sea. The body was not brought on deck, and was not sewed in canvas; but swathed

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about in a lamb's wool comforter, weighted with the shot of a six-pounder, it passed from the arms of Williams, through the port of her room, into the keeping of the sea.

Then without a word to the woman that knelt sobbing by the open port he went on deck.

When the *Islander* was cleared and ready to cast off, Williams returned to the *Neptune* cabin with La Salle and one of the natives; but Lania Du Beque was not there. They looked and spoke her name. There was no answer. On the deck lay an open leather casket with a ring and broken necklace near by, as if at last she had cast away the vain trifles that had brought so much sin and shame into her life.

La Salle pointed to the open port. Williams nodded slightly, his breast swelling and his face set as if forcing back and down whatever it was of sorrow, regret, or agony that struggled up. He did not speak, but reaching out quietly closed the port, and bolted it, perhaps unaware of what he was doing but moved by a deep feeling that something should be done; and with that gesture brought to an end the greatest tragedy of his tragic life.

They returned to the *Islander*. The afternoon was nearly gone. Their course lay eastward, and the wind as if to hurry them away lay behind their sails and whistled with wailing notes against the strained backstays.

Far behind them the *Neptune*, with strange bouyancy for a wrecked, doomed, leaking craft, turned with slow drifting around and around before the waves, and she came against the sun as it leaned on the rim of the world, huge and red like the great eye of God peering over the horizon. And amid the rigging a black speck dangled like a spot against the sun; then the sun slowly drew itself below the line of racing waves, and darkness came upon the ocean.

THE END

ETHAN ALLEN CHALLENGED BY HIS BROTHER

by LEWIS APPLETON BARKER

THE fame of Ethan Allen, the sturdy leader of the Green Mountain Boys and captor of Ticonderoga, is so great that it has overshadowed that of his younger brother, Ira, whose services in the early days of the Republic entitle him to remembrance apart from his more celebrated relative. And comparatively few people, today, realize his existence; or if they do, that at one time a challenge passed between the brothers which was due to their political differences.

Ira was thirteen years Ethan's junior, having been born in Connecticut in 1752. In early life he went to Vermont, and was active in the boundary disputes with New York concerning the New Hampshire Grants. At the start of the Revolution, siding with the Crown, he went to Canada.

Ethan, in a rage at his choice, endeavored, through the Vermont Assembly, to have his brother's property confiscated. As a result Ira sent Ethan a challenge to a duel, which that hard-bitted old patriot—usually so eager for a fight of any sort—declined, on the ground that "it would be disgraceful to fight a Tory."

Later in the war Ira embraced the cause of the Colonies, and the brothers became reconciled. He was a member of the First Constitutional Convention of Vermont, and its first Secretary of State. In turn he occupied the offices of Treasurer, Member of the Council, Surveyor General, and Major General of Militia, in which latter capacity he went to Europe in 1795 to purchase a supply of arms for Vermont.

The vessel in which he returned, carrying several thousand muskets and some cannon, was captured by an English ship of war, and he was held prisoner for some years, accused of supplying Irish rebels with arms. But he was finally vindicated. He died in Philadelphia in 1814.

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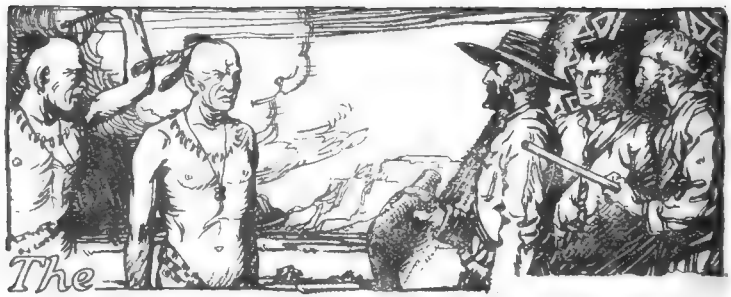

The WANDERINGS of JAMES PATTIE

by FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

Author of "The Most Consummate Villain," "Cassidy and the Wild Bunch," etc.

IT WAS Spring when young James Pattie turned his back upon his home and set forth with his father into the Western wilderness. That is the season when adventures should begin; new grass and bursting buds, the languid breeze and the odor of damp earth—all these things then combine to stir the blood and rouse within a man the same restlessness which sends the wild geese honking northward through the skies.

> When all the world is young, lad,
> And all the trees are green
> And every goose a swan, lad,
> And every lass a queen,
> Then hey for boot and horse, lad!
> And round the world away.
> Young blood must have its course, lad,
> And every dog his day.

Charles Kingsley was a Church of England clergyman when he wrote those lines, but he voiced in them the feeling of a rough-necked host who have played truant from church and school and all of civilization's binding customs through the ages. There could be no better beginning for this story than that stanza—and when the tale comes to its close, no better ending than the last words of the same poem.

The world was young when James Pattie and his father left the log-cabin and the sawmill on the wooded banks of the Gasconade River where the older man had driven off the Indians and cleared a bit of farmland. They two were footloose with no ties to bind them; for death had come to the cabin that Winter; and when Sylvester Pattie buried his wife he sickened at the sight of the familiar things and loneliness grew heavy within him. So he sold the land, turned the rest of the children over to relatives back in Kentucky, and took the long-barreled rifle with which he had fought his way hither down the Ohio; to leave the country with his eldest son and forget his sorrow in the hard excitement of the wilderness.

They journeyed to St. Louis, one hundred miles away. Beyond the raw town lay the unknown West; wide grassy prairies, burning plains, rivers that wandered down from mountain-passes which no man had seen; uncharted lakes and snow-capped peaks without a name. Into the vague northern reaches of this land, the muddy Missouri wound between low bluffs. Somewhere beyond the hard line where the brown plains met the blue sky to the southward lay the mysterious Spanish city of Santa Fé. These things they had before them on that Spring morning of 1824 and St. Louis was the gateway.

The town was humming like a hive of bees. A thousand men bent on a hundred mighty quests were rendezvousing here. Big-boned flat boatmen who had followed the ice down the Ohio gathered on the river-bank to talk, in a jargon of Creole French, bastard Spanish and backwoods English, of voyages down the Mississippi to

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distant Natchez and New Orleans. Groups of French Canadian *voyageurs* from Mackinaw, in their parti-colored blanket-coats and their scarlet sashes, chattered in the sunshine with swarthy half-breed *courers de bois*, scarcely distinguishable from the silent sloe-eyed Indians who lounged beside them, while they bided the loading of the fur-company's keel-boats for the Summer's expedition to the head of the distant Yellowstone.

Up-town the noises of building mingled with the rattle of heavy wagons and two-wheeled carts. Here and there, among the new brick walls, there remained a white mansion with long French windows and wide verandas; and now and then a goateed Frenchman, with his wide hat, ruffled shirt and tight-strapped trousers, passed among the crowds that thronged the wooden sidewalks.

Occasionally there came some of those lean weatherbeaten men in butternut jeans and deerskin hunting-shirts who had pressed onward, from Virginia to Kentucky, and from Kentucky through the Ohio forests seeking this outlet to a new frontier. Sylvester Pattie hailed more than one of them to talk of the recent war of 1812 when he had led a company of them against the allied tribes.

Sometimes in those Spring days there passed, among the sidewalk crowds, gaunt savage men whose beards were shot with gray, whose skin the sun and wind had burned as red as any Indian's, whose hair hung to the shoulders beneath great caps of foxskin. Their garments of smoke-tanned buckskin were fringed with colored porcupine-quills; their moccasins were ornate with patterned beads; the stocks of their long-barreled rifles and their powder-horns were decorated with brass tacks.

Their deep-set eyes held that same steadiness which some of us of a later generation have seen in the eyes of old prospectors. These were free trappers, sons of Kentucky and Missouri who had wandered across the prairies and the sage-brush hills to rove among the solitudes of the snow-peaks which part the waters of the continent. And when young James Pattie looked upon them he felt his breath come tight, for he hoped that the day was near when he was to become one of those pathfinders.

In St. Louis the father made up his mind to go into the country of the upper Missouri. He bought supplies: Salt, coffee, flour, tobacco, traps, powder, lead. He outfitted with goods for trading with the Indians—bright-colored cloth, tomahawks, knives, beads and gewgaws. He found three followers, loaded the bulk of his stores on a keel-boat which was to take the stuff as far as Council Bluffs; and then the little company started on horseback, following the river's course.

They journeyed through the woodlands past the last fringe of cabins where Creole trappers lived with their Indian wives and broods of dusky children; they reached the edge of the prairies; and at Cabanne's trading-post where Omaha now stands, they fell in with Sylvester Pratte, son of a famous fur-trader, who was about to leave for Santa Fé with a large pack-train. He needed a veteran to handle his expedition and he tried to persuade Pattie to join him; but the Missourian shook his head. He was set on seeing the upper Missouri.

However when the Patties reached the military post at Council Bluffs the commandant informed them that they could not traffic with the Indians in the upper country without a permit. Summer was well along. Rather than lose the time to go back to St. Louis and obtain official permission, the father decided to change his plans.

"We'll go to Santa Fé," he said, "with Pratte."

THEY struck off westward across the prairie for the banks of the main Platte. Three or four evenings later they came down into the cottonwoods and willows by the river-bottom where the camp-fires were twinkling among the trees. The Pratte party numbered more than one hundred men, Missourians for the most part; and when they saw Sylvester Pattie, who had gained fame in the War of 1812 leading a company of rangers against the Indians, they swung their wide-rimmed hats and cheered.

It was agreed that night, that he should take command. A few days later they lined out on the old trapper's trail—very much the same route as Lieutenant Zebulon Pike had taken—by way of the Platte and the eastern fringes of the Rocky Mountains for Santa Fé. For the famous road which cut across the present State of Kansas, the road which saw so much of fighting and

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hardship, was not in existence on that August morning of 1824. These men had no track to mark their course; and no maps save the memory of scratches in the dust whereby trappers and friendly Indians had outlined the larger rivers and the divides between.

Three hundred pack-mules, one hundred and sixteen men mounted on saddle-horses—that was the caravan. Outriders kept well ahead and far on either side, seasoned backwoodsmen in buckskin hunting-shirts, shod in moccasins, bearing their long-barreled muzzle-loading rifles across their saddle-bows. Within this thin fringe of scouts the pack-mules lined out behind a white bell-mare, flanked by the other members of the company. About them all the green prairie stretched away as level as the sea.

On the first evening they came to a friendly village of the Pawnee Loups just as a party of young warriors was returning from an expedition against the distant Comanches with half a dozen scalps and a little boy whom they had taken prisoner. Now the *thump thump* of the war-drums sounded, and all the braves joined in a scalp-dance. For three days and nights they leaped about the pole upon which the bloody trophies hung. The little captive lay, half-dead from thirst and hunger, in a lodge near by. At last the ceremonial reached a climax and the naked warriors surged yelling to the teepee to bring the child forth for the torture. They found Sylvester Pattie and his son in the doorway; the open space about was filled with the Missouri backwoodsmen.

"I'll give ten yards of cloth for the boy," the elder Pattie told them and unrolled a bolt of scarlet fabric before the chief.

The latter shook his head.

"All right," said Pattie. "We'll take him anyhow."

The Indian looked about him at the circle of white men with their rifles in their hands.

"Do you think," he asked slowly, "that you can do it?"

"If we should die," Pattie answered, "our countrymen will come and destroy your nation."

The chief considered for a moment.

"Throw in a paper of vermillion, then," he said.

So when the company departed from the village the youngster rode behind the saddle of a bearded rifleman, and in the evenings when they made their camp he played among the dogs about the fire.

They left the prairies and came out on the great plains where the earth was baked to rocklike hardness and the coarse grass was burned by the Summer sun. They saw the passing herds of buffalo. One night the report of a sentry's rifle brought them leaping from their blankets and they fought off a band of prowling Arickarees who had sought to steal their horses. They reached the prairie-dog villages and the rolling country. They turned into the southwest and, when they were crossing the low-cut bank hills between the headwaters of the Republican and the Smoky Hill, they found the stark bodies of two white men lying asprawl in the afternoon sunshine.

A multitude of horse tracks and five dead Crow Indians near by told the story of the fight against hopeless odds. Young James Pattie and ten others followed the trail of the savages to their camp. That night sixty men surrounded the place and when the Crows rolled out of their blankets in the dawn, the long-barreled rifles flashed behind the rocks and sage-brush clumps, until the camp became a shambles with thirty bodies among the ashes of the fires.

SEPTEMBER came. The hills grew higher. The expedition ran out of salt and flour. In a little draw where the sage-brush met the juniper and bull-pine they fell in with a band of wandering Comanches whom they coaxed into their camp to do some trading. A warrior caught sight of the Indian boy who was playing about the fire and his yell of joy brought his companions to his side. White men and red watched him press the youngster to his bosom. It was his son.

The pack-train wound its way into the mountains. One night a grizzly bear stole into camp and killed a horse. He turned upon the men and wounded one so badly that they had to leave him with two companions to wait for him to die.

Early in November they came down into the valley of Taos; and when they had paid duty on their goods to the *alcalde* of the old pueblo, they journeyed on to Santa Fé.

The City of the Holy Faith lay drowsing by the headwaters of the Rio Grande, surrounded by pallid mountains whose flanks were dotted with gray-green oaks. Dogs

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swarmed in all the narrow streets. The square, flat-topped adobe buildings were flecked with scarlet where the clusters of chili hung from the roof-poles. Women whose faces were almost hidden by the tightly drawn *reboses* came into the courtyards to stare at the ragged, bearded horsemen and the laden pack-mules. Sombreroed men, with picturesque serapes and leather breeches slashed open from the knees, slouched along after the cavalcade, to lounge at ease in the wide plaza before the governor's collonaded one-story palace, watching the unloading of the packs. All the town turned out, for the arrival of Americans was a rare thing in those days and not a family in the place but was eager to buy some of the wares which had come from distant St. Louis.

But barter was now only an incident with Sylvester Pattie for he had talked with young Pratte of richer opportunities to the westward, until the project of trapping for beaver-skins in the unknown land beyond the crests of the pallid mountains was uppermost in both their minds. Already some one had told them of the Gila River which no American had ever seen. They went to the one-story palace with its wide verandas and asked Governor Bartolome Baca for a permit to trap and trade along the stream.

He put them off at first. Then he hemmed and hawed some more. They offered him five per cent. of their catch. Still he delayed decision. It began to look as if they were going to meet with refusal. And then one night a horseman rode into town with news that the Mescallero Apaches had raided the settlements down in the Pecos Valley. They had carried off five women, among whom was the daughter of a former Spanish governor. Four hundred cavalry were lined up in the plaza the next morning to go forth against the savages. Sylvester Pattie saw his opportunity to come into the good graces of the authorities and offered to take his backwoodsmen with the expedition. The officer in charge went him one better and gave him the command.

So the Mexican cavalry clattered away from Santa Fé that morning with one hundred lean sunbrowned Missourians riding in the van. Three days they rode into the southeast and picked up the trail of the Apaches somewhere near where Fort Sumner stood afterward. Now they traveled hard into the south and west for two nights and two days and on the third morning, as they were approaching the El Capitan Mountains, the scouts came back to the main body with news that they had sighted the Indians hurrying up a cañon toward the summit of the range.

"I'll take my men by a roundabout course to the head of the pass," Sylvester Pattie told the Mexican commander, "and ambush them there. You follow them up the gulch and when you hear our firing, close in."

An hour later, young James Pattie lay on his belly behind a rock in the little swale where the pass crossed the summit and listened to the orders which his father gave the men about him.

"They'll kill those women if they get the chance," the old Indian fighter said. "We mustn't give them time for that. As soon as they show up, you on the right flank give them a volley. While you're reloading the left of the line will keep up a running fire."

The horses were tied well out of sight. The men lay motionless behind the scattered oaks and the outcroppings of the living rock. Time passed. There came the sound of hoofbeats. A band of horses appeared trotting up the narrow gulch; a drove of sheep followed them in the cañon bed. Then the watchers saw the herders—five white women, half-naked, panting from the hard climb. Half a dozen turbaned Apaches rode close behind them with lances in their hands.

The men behind the rocks remained as still as the arid earth on which they lay. There was no sound except the thudding of the hoofs and the plaintive voices of the sheep. And now as the cañon below was filling with Indian warriors, a horse in the lead of the herd got scent of the ambush and shied off up the hillside. The frowsy-haired riders behind the women glanced sharply toward the spot. The long-barreled Kentucky rifles united in a crashing chorus. The narrow gulch became a thick confusion of plunging animals; riderless horses wheeled about and raced into the ruck below; the sheep milled in pitiful, bleating panic; turbaned brown bodies slid limply from the ponies' backs to vanish in the dust-clouds among the trampling hoofs.

The women emerged from the dust-haze; and as they ran toward the ambuscade

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several Apache horsemen dashed along the hillside after them. The lances flashed in the hot sunshine, rising above the ponies' uptossed manes.

Young James Pattie leaped from his cover, swinging his clubbed rifle above his head. A dozen others were at his heels. A man beside him fell dead. He saw three of the captives sink to the earth, lanced through and through. The two surviving women were striving toward him with a naked savage close behind. The warrior's lean brown arm flew upward; the spear hung for an instant poised above the foremost of the fugitives. The weapon started to descend; it faltered and went wild and the Indian pitched forward with a bullet between his eyes. A moment later the two women fell half-fainting at young Pattie's feet.

They took the rescued pair back to the line; then fell upon their knees and went to reloading their rifles. While they crouched behind their cover, firing at every turbaned head that showed, there rose a murmur among the Missourians.

"Where are those Mexicans?" they asked one another.

At last the Indians began falling back. As they followed them, creeping from rock to rock, they heard a volley in the gulch below them. But the Mexican troops fled as soon as they had discharged their pieces and the Apaches rallied where the cañon opened out. They turned on the Americans and made so fierce a charge that it seemed for a few minutes as if they would carry everything before them.

"Take to the woods boys," Sylvester Pattie called. "Those —— Spaniards have quit us, but we're enough for these Indians alone."

They fell back among the scattered oak-timber and they saw the frowsy-haired savages come on within short pistol-range. Then the deadliness of the long-barreled rifles broke the rush. The Apaches fled, and the Mexican soldiers came up to massacre the wounded. Sylvester Pattie drove them off and there were high words between him and the Spanish commander, who took his men back to Santa Fé leaving the Americans to follow by themselves.

During that march they learned that one of the women who had fallen at young James Pattie's feet was the daughter of the former Spanish governor. And when they reached the capital Sylvester Pattie was able to gain his coveted permission. Within a week the Missourians had split into numerous small parties bent on trading and trapping.

One hundred and sixteen of them, when they started from the Platte; now there were less than one hundred living; and a year later, there remained only sixteen. Sickness and savages and the grim southwestern wilderness got all the rest.

IT WAS the beginning of the Winter of 1824-25 when young James Pattie went with his father and five men down the Rio Grande to Socorro, thence across the mountains toward the headwaters of the Gila River where no American had set foot before. That was a Winter of great adventures all along the backbone of the Continental Divide. Far to the north a young fellow by the name of Jedediah Smith was holed up on the headwaters of the Snake River, making his plans for the extension of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, which plans were subsequently to take him across the passes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Jim Bridger, still a boy in years, was trapping beaver along the streams which he was to follow before the next Spring to the spot where the mountains widened and gave him the view of the Great Salt Lake, which no white man had seen until that day.

A hundred other lean, weatherstained sons of Kentucky and Tennessee were prowling along the watercourses which led upward toward the fields of perpetual snow, dodging Indians, eating their saddle-horses sometimes when game was scarce. Up on the Sweetwater one of them by the name of Scott, left dying by his companions, crawled sixty miles on hands and knees before he gave up to death. And Peg Leg Smith, with his leg broken and no man to help him, amputated the limb himself in a cabin among the Wasatch Mountains.

These were the free trappers. Young James Pattie belonged to that same breed. And one can see him now as he rode with his companions into the unknown wilderness, a typical specimen of those pathfinders whose part in their country's history the textbooks of our schools have studiously ignored —the roll of blankets behind his saddle cantle; in front on either side a bunch of beaver-traps; in his right hand and held

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athwart the saddle-bow, the long eight-square muzzle-loading flint-lock rifle. He wore a cap of fox-skin under which his hair hung to his shoulders; a loose hunting-coat and fringed breeches of smoke-tanned buckskin; and he was shod in moccasins. A powder-horn hung by his side and in his belt there were two pistols and a butcher-knife.

Somewhere among the hills they fell in with seven other American trappers and the two parties joined forces. At the Santa Rita copper-mines, which the Mexicans were then working, they rested their horses and early in December they went on, over ridges and up cañons, in and out among the tangle of peaks, until they reached the Gila's headwaters. Hunting was good. They found beaver signs and split into pairs to work the different streams.

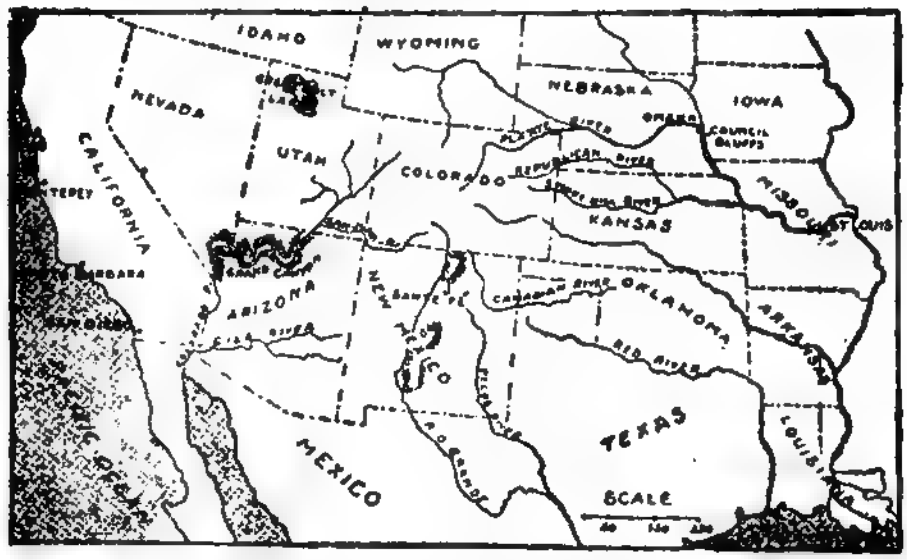
So James Pattie went with a companion following a mountain creek, wading waist-deep sometimes to set their traps, sleeping by night beneath the snapping stars. When they returned to rejoin their fellows they learned that the seven who had fallen in with them had deserted. Now the party followed the Gila westward, but the seceders had trapped the country clean ahead of them and frightened off the game. Lean days came; their horses went sore-footed. They had begun to eat the ponies before they reached the mouth of the San Francisco and got good hunting. While they were here six of the deserters came into their camp and told how the Indians had stolen their horses, killin gone of their number. They begged three ponies and enough provisions to reach the copper-mines.

Now the Patties went on westward; until a band of Indians ambushed them somewhere in the southern slope of the White Mountains and ran off most of their horses after an ugly battle.

For three months longer they wandered back and forth along the streams. They climbed into the deep snows; they came down into the long open mesa where the giant cactus-forests grow. Sometimes they slept without camp-fires for fear of prowling savages. There were lean days when they were glad to get a stray raven or a buzzard for food, when they staggered on, with their moccasins worn out and their feet bleeding, reeling from hunger's weakness. Finally they reached the San Francisco River and got meat again. They cached their furs and returned to the Santa Rita mines.

James Pattie went to Santa Fé where he bought fresh ponies and stocked up with provisions. His father remained at the copper-mines while he and a few companions journeyed to the San Francisco to get the furs. He found the cache empty. The Indians had rifled it.

Now Sylvester Pattie was beginning to feel that he had enough of trapping and he took a lease on the Santa Rita mines. But the boy was still on fire for adventure and so that Spring he joined a party of twelve French trappers and went back into the western wilderness.



Somewhere near the junction of the San Pedro and the Gila the Papagoes fell upon the little band. Young Pattie and two others were the only survivors of the massacre. They fell in with a company of twenty Americans a few days later and, after taking time enough off to wipe out the most of the Indians who had done the killing, they went on down the Gila, through the arid deserts, to its mouth. They traded with the naked Yumas on the banks of the turgid Colorado. They turned into the north and somewhere near the mouth of Bill Williams Fork they had a bloody battle with a bunch of Mohave Indians who tried to steal their horses.

Then they went along the rim of the Grand Cañon; and they cursed the cliffs to admire which men now travel across the continent. For they could not reach the stream-bed and there was no beaver on these arid table-lands. They saw the Moqui villages on their lofty mesas; they trafficked with the Navahoes along the San Juan. They went into the north until they reached

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the Wind River country where they fought a fierce battle against the Shoshones. They wandered on to the banks of the distant Yellowstone. They crossed the mountains to the upper Snake; then recrossed and came back southward along the foot-hills, past the upper Platte, the Arkansas and the Cimmaron until at last they saw the flat roofs of Santa Fé down in the sunshiny valley before them.

Their pack-horses were laden down with beaver pelts. But while they were in the first flush of joy at reaching the city, the governor sent for them.

"Where is your permit to trap and trade?" he demanded.

James Pattie showed him the one he had issued after that battle with the Mescallero Apaches. He glanced at it and shrugged his shoulders.

"That has run out," he said, and bade the soldiers confiscate the furs.

So James Pattie rode over the mountains to the copper-mines of Santa Rita with nothing more than a tale of hard luck to show for all his months in the wilderness.

"Better," his father told him, "you settle down here with me. We can make good money." The young fellow tried it—but the occasional brushes with the Apaches and the grizzly bear hunts were too tame for him. He took a trip down into old Mexico and saw strange things. When he returned in the Summer of 1827 he learned that the bookkeeper whom his father employed had absconded with all the profits of the mines. The two men talked the matter over.

"We'll go trapping down the Gila," the father said, "and we'll strike out from its mouth to California."

They outfitted in Santa Fé; it took all the money they had to buy horses and provisions for two men besides themselves, but on the eve of their departure they fell in with thirty trappers bound on a similar venture and Sylvester Pattie managed to get a permit for the whole party to trap and trade. In part because of this and in part because of his experience at Indian fighting they chose him for their leader.

So on September 23d 1827 they set forth from the City of the Holy Faith. Probably they foresaw some of the obstacles which lay before them; and possibly Sylvester Pattie, who was an old hand at leading such rough-and-ready expeditions, was not unprepared to face the trouble which was to rise among his followers. But they did not even dream of certain surprizes which Nature held in store beyond the western skyline, or of the trick which Fate had already played in a drowsy little valley where the San Diego mission looked out between low hills to the blue waters of the bay.

Right at the outset Sylvester Pattie made a rule whereby the man who deserted or refused to obey orders was to be shot. Before they had been a week in the mountains by the Gila's headwaters they began to realize the necessity for that grim law; for game was scarce; they had to eat their dogs; they had some ugly Indian fighting and it took iron discipline to hold them all together. They traveled on westward into the long dry plains where the giant cactus grew. There famine came again; they killed some of their saddle-horses and picked the bones clean. One day late in November when they were down below the Maricopa flats, all but six of the men deserted the Patties and struck off toward the mountains in the northwest. What became of them remains one of the desert's many mysteries.

The other eight kept on. Within a week they reached the Gila's mouth and found a village of Yuma Indians upon the Colorado's eastern bank. It was past noon. The naked warriors came forth from their *tulle* lodges and gathered about the little group of white men. James Pattie and his father talked with them in the silent sign-language which was universal among the western tribes. Some of the older savages said that there were Christian settlements farther down the stream. They may have meant the Mexican seaports on the Gulf of California; they may have lied. At any rate they told the story and in time it bore its fruit.

While they were holding this conference Sylvester Pattie was keeping one eye on the strapping warriors in the crowd about them; and what he saw he did not like.

"There are too many of these Indians," he told his followers. "Better we cross the river and make our camp on the other side."

So they swam their horses over and they set about their preparations to make down their beds; but before they were fairly at it, here came two hundred bucks, as naked as the day they were born; some of them swimming and some in frail little canoes.

"Pack up and move boys," said Sylvester Pattie.

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They loaded the tired horses once more and struck off up-stream for sixteen miles. It was nearly dark when the leader thought it wise to stop; and so they had no time to build a corral for the ponies, which was their usual custom whenever possible among hostile Indians. They picketed out the animals, and before they had the camp-fire fairly started it began to rain. The night came down black dark. The storm grew harder. The thunder cracked; the lightning flashed. They heard the horses snorting in the tulles. And even as they were looking toward the spot, there came a terrific peal of thunder. Silence followed. And then the hideous shrill warwhoop rose on all sides of them. The trappers ran to save the ponies and found only the severed picket-ropes.

They came back to the rain-soaked ashes of their fire and talked the matter over.

"We'll trail those Indians," they said, "and get the horses back."

So they started with the dawn and hung to the tracks until they came to the mouth of a cañon which led up into a range of saw-toothed hills. Their water had given out; they were half-dead from thirst. They turned back to the river-bottom and now they remembered what the Yumas had told them about the white people down the stream.

"We'll build canoes," Sylvester Pattie proposed, "and go on down the river to those settlements."

They made a barricade of logs to fortify their camp and they kept a sentry posted in a tree-top, while the others went to work cutting down cottonwoods. They hollowed out eight clumsy little boats, loaded in their furs and started paddling down the Colorado.

At first they took it slowly, trapping as they went, but as the days went on, they noticed that the pelts of the beaver were growing poorer in this warm climate. So they contented themselves with what they had; it was a large catch—enough to make every man of them comfortable for the rest of his days, provided they ever got it back to market.

Occasionally they had a brush with the Yumas who dogged their course for some time, seeking to ambush them when they came close to the banks. Once they ran across some friendly savages who said they were Pimas and shook their heads when asked about white people down the stream. There came a time when the river seemed to be running along the summit of a ridge, and they could look out from their little crafts upon bottomlands that lay below them. They passed this seeming miracle; but a few evenings later they were confronted by another. And this was an appalling spectacle.

They had come ashore and made their camp on the flat beside the great, tawny flood. They did not know that they were within a few miles of its mouth; and had they known it, they would never have dreamed of the phenomenon which was about to take place; for they were inland men, used to the mountains and the forests, ignorant of the ways of the sea. Darkness came down. They rolled up in their blankets.

As they lay there, they heard a faint murmur; it grew and grew until it was like the rushing of a wind among the branches. A man shouted in alarm. The water had climbed the bank and was creeping into his bed.

The others leaped from their blankets. The noise of the flood was in their ears. One lighted a torch. They saw a brown wave marching straight up-stream toward them. They managed to seize their canoes before they drifted away. Within a few minutes they were paddling over the spot where their camp had been, rescuing such bits of flotsam as they could lay their hands on.

The hours went by. The crest of the flood had passed. The waters began to recede. Dawn came and the earth lay bare again. They spent a hard morning recovering their beaver-pelts and supplies, and young James Pattie, who had been down to Guaymas the year before, remembered how he had seen the tides come in. So that explained the miracle. It was a tidal bore. But the explanation left them confronting a new problem. Their cranky little canoes would never weather such swells as this. Further travel into the southward was impossible and they could not paddle up-stream against the current.

What the Indians had failed to do, Nature had accomplished. They were afoot; eight men in the heart of the southwestern deserts surrounded by hostile savages.

"We can buy horses on the seacoast," the two Patties told the others. "Then we can

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return; pick up the pelts and go on back to Santa Fé."

So they decided to cache their furs and walk to California.

BUT first they traveled up-stream for ten miles or so, with the help of each day's tides, and there they buried the beaver-pelts after the manner of the trappers, lining the pit with skins, removing all the excavated earth and throwing it into the river; and finally covering the hole with the original layer of leaf-mold. When they had set every twig and stone in place, making the surface look as if it had been untouched, they took some dried beaver-meat, their rifles, blankets and ammunition and struck off across the bottom-lands into the west.

On the second day they emerged from the tangle of vines and brush and came up into low sand-hills. They climbed the ridges and the sun was growing hot when they came down on a salt plain that glistened, white as snow. As they went on, the light grew blinding in their eyes.

They toiled on westward straight into the hottest, driest desert of North America. Since their day many men have made that journey across the peninsula of Baja California, but few have come forth without a memory of grim hardship that lasted as long as they lived. And more than one has left his bones to dry beneath that scorching sun.

The long plain seemed to lengthen as they went. Their skins grew fevered, their tongues began to swell with thirst; the mirage rose before them and they staggered toward the fantom waters, to see the vision dissolve into the glaring sky. That night they flung themselves upon the scorched earth and slept. In the morning the sun flayed them again.

Low hills appeared ahead. They reached the range and as they climbed toward the west the loose earth rose above their ankles dragging at their limbs. They straggled on in single file, and young James Pattie always held the lead. At last he gained the summit of a ridge and saw real waters shimmering below him in the sunshine. He waved his hand. The others hurried after him. They stumbled as they ran. But when they reached the shores of the lake, they found the water bitter brine.

The long lake lay between them and the west. The Pacific ocean and the Spanish settlements were over there somewhere beyond the horizon. So now they took their butcher-knives and cut great bundles of the tulles which grew about the edges of the sink; they lashed the bundles together into rafts and placed their packs upon them. Then they swam and waded, pushing the rafts before them; and when they reached the other side, they struck out into the desert again.

Within a mile James Pattie saw the tracks of Indians. They followed these and reached a beaten trail. They hung to it and staggered up a little draw which led them into a range of stucco mountains. And at last they beheld the smoke of camp-fires rising among the saw-toothed peaks.

These might be the fires of hostile savages. They did not know. Nor did they care. As well to die by arrows as to perish of thirst. They plodded on across the next summit and saw the lodges of a considerable village by a living stream.

The people of that village fled at the sight of these ragged bearded men. They lay behind the ridges and watched them fall upon their bellies by the ice-cold creek. And then some of them came stealing back, to make their peace with the hapless wanderers and give them food.

A few days later the trappers set forth again into the west. One of the Indians went with them as their guide. Across the range of mountains, he said, were white men; but the trail was steep and there was no water for many miles.

They climbed toward the distant skyline under a savage sun. The dry air seemed to sear their lungs. The water which they carried with them ran out. Thirst returned to torture them. The naked Indian walked on before, and when the weaker ones of the company began to stagger he exhorted them by signs to keep on. What they had endured during the first stage of their journey from the Colorado was but a little thing compared to the punishment which Nature gave them now. Night yielded a little surcease; and then the blazing day came back. Their tongues turned black and protruded from their mouths. They could not speak. The Indian pointed on ahead. They did their best to stagger after him. But at last James Pattie saw his father and another man sink down among the rocks. He left them lying there and clambered up

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the arid cañon, stumbling sometimes, and sometimes crawling on his bleeding hands and knees. Until at last he reached the head of the gorge and found a limpid stream emerging from the rocks, to bury itself within a few yards in the hot sand. He filled his powder-horn with water as soon as he was able to travel and brought it to the pair who had lain down to die.

They rested for some hours and then they crossed the summit of the range and came down the western slope to the Mission of Santa Catalina on the headwaters of the San Quentin River. And when they stumbled into the quadrangle among the rambling adobe buildings before the church, footsore, gaunt with hunger and weary from their long hardships, they got their first inkling of the trick which Fate had prepared for them a year before.

In the fall of 1826 Jedediah Smith and fourteen trappers of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company had come to Alta California from the Great Salt Lake, by way of the Virgin River, the upper Colorado and the Mohave Desert. And when the word of this party's arrival reached Governor Encheandia at San Diego, that official remembered certain warnings which he had received from the City of Mexico; warnings against all Americans which were founded on several filibustering expeditions into Texas and Chihuahua.

So Encheandia suspected these visitors and only the good offices of one or two New England skippers whose ships were hide-trading along the coast, prevented him from throwing them all into prison. As it was he bade them to leave the country. But Jedediah Smith was slow in departing. What with hard luck and his desire to trap along the valley of the San Joaquin, he took a full year in getting his men out of California. In the mean time more warnings came from the City of Mexico, and stricter instructions to look out for Americans who bore no passports.

That was the situation. The governor had sent the word around. There was a sort of general fear of filibusters in the air. And when the Dominican fathers saw this new band of tattered weatherstained adventurers and heard their wild tales of deeds beyond belief, they did what they deemed to be the prudent thing, and placed them under arrest.

So the expedition of the Patties ended here. They had come all these weary leagues, had suffered all these hardships and outfaced all these dangers—only to land in jail.

The mission authorities sent the prisoners to San Diego. There Governor Encheandia listened to the tale which James Pattie and his father told. He shook his head.

"Where," he demanded, "are your passports?"

They showed him the permit from the governor at Santa Fé to trap and trade.

"That is worthless in California," he said, and turned to the officer in charge. "Put them behind the bars."

The weeks dragged by. The months succeeded one another. The hardships which he had undergone had left Sylvester Pattie worn out; jail life and food which was unfit for a man in good health brought on his last sickness. He died alone in his cell; and his son, by special dispensation of the governor, was allowed to witness the burial.

There followed more weary months. Through the intervention of Captain Cunningham and Captain John Bradshaw, two Yankee skippers whose ships were in San Diego Harbor, James Pattie was finally allowed a little more liberty. Sometimes he served as interpreter for the authorities; and finally he secured from Encheandia an agreement whereby the other luckless members of the expedition were allowed to return under guard to the Colorado with pack-horses to recover the cached beaver-pelts. If they could produce the skins he would, he said, believe their contention that they were honest trappers and set them free. But when the party reached the spot they found that a great freshet had washed out a new river-channel here. The furs were gone. And Encheandia clapped them all into jail again.

That year an epidemic of smallpox broke out in the Alta California missions. The terror of the plague spread to San Diego. James Pattie had some vaccine and lancets which his father had kept at the Santa Rita mines; he understood their use. So he got a year on parole to vaccinate the Indians.

He bade his fellow prisoners good-by. What eventually became of them is not known. He traveled back and forth along the old El Camino Real. He saw strange things. But there is only one of them for which this story has the space. It took

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place in the old Spanish capital of Monterey. A Mexican leader by the name of Solis had started a rebellion against Governor Encheandia. The troops in the Monterey presidio, together with most of the people in the town, were in full sympathy with the movement. One day word came that the loyal forces were about to engage the seceders down near Santa Barbara, and the ragged soldiers marched forth into the southward to join forces with their rebel friends.

Now at this time Captain Cooper, a New England shipsmaster, was in the port. His sympathies, and those of the other Americans and British in the town, were with the existing authorities. He was a man of resources, and he hit upon a plan to quell this uprising. Young Pattie helped him to execute this novel coup.

The conspirators gave it out that they had just got news of an insurgent victory south of the Santa Margharita Pass. They brought ashore from Cooper's ship a barrel of good strong Jamaica rum. They spread the tidings of the battle and invited every one to join them in a celebration. Monterey responded to a man. Within twelve hours that portion of the population who were in sympathy with Solis were gloriously drunk. Then Captain Cooper, James Pattie and their handful of followers took possession of the Presidio and its stores of arms.

On the next day the forces of Solis, who had engaged in a bloodless encounter with Encheandia's troops, came marching into town expecting a warm reception. They got it, but not as they had anticipated. The American and English residents welcomed them with a volley of musket-balls. There followed a lively little skirmish, and the rebellion became a thing of the past.

Encheandia was grateful. And Pattie got his freedom as a consequence. He left the scene of this comic-opera revolution and, through the assistance of some American residents, he made his way to Mexico City. For he was determined to see the authorities at the capital and get some redress for what he had suffered.

There is no need to make this story longer in telling the details of that fruitless quest. There came a day when James Ohio Pattie departed from Mexico, broken in spirit, penniless.

Kind men helped him on his way. Some months later he came to the Kentucky farm where his grandfather still lived. The other children had married off and scattered to far places. He found himself, with no familiar faces about him, save that of the old man whom he had last seen when he was a little child.

> When all the world is old, lad,
> And all the trees are brown,
> And all the sport is stale, lad,
> And all the wheels run down,
> Creep home and take your place there
> The spent and maimed among.
> God grant you'll find one face there
> You loved when all was young.

The fun was over, it was the same old story—the story of nine great adventures out of ten—hardship and toil and not a cent to show for it. Probably it took him years to realize that, in the very things which he had undergone, lay his reward.

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The MASTER of the DJINNOON

An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali

by GEORGE E. HOLT

Author of "The Hand of Friendship," "Chestnuts," etc.

"The Key of Chance unlocks the Door of Adventure." *Proverbs of Mohamed Ali.*

MOHAMED ALI, outlaw with a price upon his head, and hunted high and low, had left the safety of the wild Anjera hills, and was passing through the night as inconspicuously as possible, along a narrow, cañon-like street in Tangier city. Lumps of shadows lay like piles of black paint upon the blue cobblestones, and walls which gleamed silver in the moonlight became, at a sudden turn or angle, lost in startling darkness. The street, as is the way with many Tangier streets at night, was almost deserted.

At a distance a belated donkey and his master made a little clatter over the stones, the voice of the driver addressing gentle curses, half-angry, half-kindly, to the tired beast. From a little nearer at hand came the sound of hob-nails upon stone, the English-made brogans of the native guard who marched back and forth—once in a while—before a big gate which marked the entrance to the house of a Moroccan official.

The dark form which was Mohamed Ali slippered across a space of moonlight. It was not the usual figure of Mohamed Ali himself—a big, straight-backed man—but of a stooping, shuffling beggar, a bamboo staff in one hand, a begging-bowl in the other. One eye and cheek were covered by a generous and dirty bandage, and a brown *djellaba* exhibited crude, quilt-work patching. No one could possibly have taken this creature for anything save one of the many beggars which infest the Tangier streets of daytime, and who after dark prowl around seeking, fastidiously, for a spot in which to lie down and sleep.

Mohamed Ali had taken pains with his disguise, as he now took pains with his progress, even though there seemed to be none to see him—for the very danger which had caused him to risk the visit to Tangier, added immensely to that risk. In the wild Anjera hills he was Mohamed Ali, outlaw and Descendant of the Prophet, loved and honored and feared, with none wishing to do him harm; in Tangier the dangers of the city menaced him on every hand. Still, he knew his disguise to be perfect; knew that no one dreamed that he was within a day's journey of the town; knew that his enemies would smile at the thought that he would dare invade the city's streets.

Wherefore the sweat flashed upon his body when, from the black shadow cast by the corner of a house, was whispered the name of Mohamed Ali.

But, fast on the heels of the lightning-like streak of panic, the quick brain of Mohamed Ali sprang into action.

"*All'arbil*" he whined, in the beggar's voice, broken by constant pleadings. "*All'arbil* Alms in the name of Allah the Compassionate," and shuffled slowly toward the blackness from which the whisper had come.

But, as he went, the hand which held the

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begging-bowl managed also to find the hilt of the curved *kumiah* which hung in its sheath beneath the patched *djellaba*.

"*All'arbi*," he whined again. "Alms in the name——"

A soft chuckle came from the shadow.

"Alms in the name of Mohamed Ali," jibed the whisper.

Now, Mohamed Ali, with that quick sense which had given so largely to his continued existence in a world of trouble, knew that this was a time for direct action. Were he to ignore the whispering, menacing shadow, and go upon his way, he would be leaving an enemy behind him. Mohamed Ali did not like to have enemies behind him; he much preferred to have them where he could see what they were about. Wherefore, with another whine for alms, he shuffled to the very edge of the inky shadow, in which he now could see the outlines of a darker mass.

"There is no need to grasp the knife at your belt, Mohamed Ali," murmured the shadow voice. "No need. And besides, I think the begging-bowl a much more dangerous weapon—in the hands of Mohamed Ali."

There was laughter in the whisper.

"I seek a place to sleep, O friend of the poor," mumbled Mohamed Ali, drawing another step nearer. "Only that——"

"Only that—and a certain letter," replied the whisper.

Now was Mohamed Ali even more startled than he had been at the sound of his name from the darkness. Startled and afraid—as one can be afraid only when there comes a sudden knowledge of treachery. For Mohamed Ali had left his haven among the hills, had donned the coarse and filthy garments of a beggar, had run the risk of the open road and the still greater risk of the walled city, for the sole purpose of obtaining a letter—a letter which menaced him, but which, were it in his own hands, would in turn become a menace to his enemies. Not being a fool, Mohamed Ali had talked of the matter to no one; even his absence from the hills was known only to his most faithful servant. Therefore—to have a shadow whisper his secret upon a street of Tangier was unpleasant.

The begging-bowl clattered upon the cobblestones, the *kumiah* flashed in the moonlight, and, as Mohamed Ali took one big stride forward, hung suspended over the shadow's left shoulder.

"No one," the soft voice of the still motionless shadow went on, "has ever accused Mohamed Ali of fear. Although many, I think, have questioned his judgment. As this is our first meeting—*ai*, put the knife away; there *is* no need for it, as you have at last realized!—as this is our first meeting, we no doubt have much to learn about each other. Wherefore——"

"And I, for one, am keen to learn," interrupted Mohamed Ali, irritation taking the place of surprize. "Who are you who shout the name of Mohamed Ali on the city streets? It is my name—yes—and I have a certain respect for it."

"As I have also, brother," said the voice. "This, perhaps, will serve to show you."

He held out his right hand. Mohamed Ali took it, watching the other's left hand meanwhile. Then he grunted: the shadow had given him the grip of a certain world-wide order.

"Good enough, brother—so far as brotherhood goes," he said. "But—you may have learned *that* as you learned—of my affairs. I might believe more if I knew more. Such, for example, as who you are."

"I am Habib, known as the Black Magician," replied the shadow laughing softly. "Perhaps you have heard of me; many have."

Mohamed Ali rendered polite silence in reply to this question: the name was new to him.

"And many have not," went on Habib dryly. "Some to their advantage; some otherwise. And I am also somewhat known as the Master of the *Djinnoon*."

"Hmph!" grunted Mohamed Ali. "I am no child—and I have been in Europe. I think the Master of the *Djinnoon* is probably the Master of Tricks."

"I have heard that Mohamed Ali is a plain speaker," replied Habib, unoffended. "As for me, I much prefer that one should *not* believe in my spirits—at first."

"*Djinnoon* there unquestionably are," said Mohamed Ali, "but neither the good *djinnoon* of Allah nor the evil spirits of *Shaitan* are to be harnessed and put to labor for—the Black Magician, even though he be a brother of the order."

"Still—there was the matter of your name," offered Habib.

"Hmph!" was Mohamed Ali's reply to that.

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"And my meeting you here."

Another grunt.

"And—the letter."

"Curses of Allah! Yes!" exclaimed Mohamed Ali. "And in this case the *djinnoon* represent treachery. Upon my return to Anjera——"

"Mustapha Hassan has breathed no word of what he knows," said Habib, and again Mohamed Ali started. Mustapha Hassan was the name of his head servant—the only man in the world, beside himself—and apparently, this mysterious figure naming himself the Master of the *Djinnoon*—who knew the purpose of his journey.

"No word," reiterated Habib. "As you shall find in due course."

"It will be best for Mustapha," growled Mohamed Ali. "And now—is there any point to all this, or do we stand here for the mere pleasure of each other's companionship? I, at least, have something else to do."

"*Aiwa*, yes; the letter, of course," murmured Habib. "But—my house is near, and if you do not spurn the aid of the Master of the *Djinnoon*—in whom you do not believe—why let us see what we shall see. And moreover, Hadj Hosein, who carries upon his person the letter you seek, is now at the *casbah*, in the house of the *khalifa*, where he dined."

"This," reflected Mohamed Ali, "is the work of *Shaitan* or his devils—for not even Mustapha knew that Hadj Hosein had the letter." And to Habib:

"Come, then; I will be your guest for an hour and we shall see what we shall see. There is something at the bottom of this which I wish to observe closely."

"Nothing, Mohamed Ali," replied Habib, as he stepped from the shadows and motioned up the street, "is at the bottom of it except my *djinnoon*—in whom you do not believe."

"Hmph!" grunted Mohamed Ali as he followed his companion, at the respectful distance a beggar would follow his benefactor. "Hmph! *Djinnoon* or no *djinnoon*," he reflected, "this man knows too much about Mohamed Ali and his affairs. His house may be a trap where death awaits me, but his knowledge alone could mean my death; wherefore if he is a friend, explanations must be forthcoming, and if he is an enemy—one of us must go upon a long journey——"

THE house of the Master of the *Djinnoon* was scarce a hundred paces away. Only a little iron-studded oaken door below, and a foot-square window above, distinguished it from the plain white wall which stretched along the street. As they passed the broganned guard Mohamed Ali raised the wail of, "*All'arbil* Alms in the name of Allah," and the Black Magician flung an encouraging phrase over his shoulder. Reaching the door, Habib fumbled a moment with a great iron key, then swung the door and entered.

"Wait here," he said, "until I make a light, that you may see your way."

"That I had intended to do," responded Mohamed Ali dryly. "It brings bad luck to enter dark houses—even with the owner of the house."

The Black Magician chuckled, and disappeared in the blackness. In a moment there was a flicker of light, and then two others, from a pair of giant candles in great twin candlesticks of brass, standing in front of a silken-covered mattress which stretched across the far end of the small room.

Mohamed Ali stepped over the threshold, took three looks—one to the left and one to the right and one above—and closed and bolted the door behind him.

Habib, standing between the two candles, smiled, and Mohamed Ali smiled in reply, while he looked into the face of his host. What he saw there reassured him. The Master of the *Djinnoon* was a big man—as big as Mohamed Ali himself, when he stood erect; perhaps even more heavily built. Or that appearance may have been given by the voluminous black satin garments which he wore. No touch of white or of color was in his bulky outer *sulham*, nor in such of the under-garments as showed. All black. And the face was as black as the garments. But it was not the usual negro face: it told Mohamed Ali at a glance that while the color had no doubt come from a black mother, the shape of the head and the outlines of the features had worthier parentage—no doubt Arab. The eyes were striking—keen, yet gentle, understanding.

"My grandfather," said Habib, "was an Arab sheik," and laughed. "Sit, Mohamed Ali, and let us get to the matter in hand."

"You have understanding above the ordinary, Sid Habib," acknowledged Mohamed Ali. "And therefore you

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unquestionably know, also, that I now have no fear."

He sat down upon the big cushions beside his host.

"But I have—some curiosity, and a great concern, over the whole matter. It is not a small one—for me—nor for others. What is the purpose of this Master of the *Djinnoon* pretense—with me?"

Now, Mohamed Ali knew men—when they were white Moors or red Berbers, or black slaves, and he knew a good deal of the white men termed "Christian"—but he did not know the black man whose brain has been partly developed to manhood while the other part remains a child. It is a psychology difficult to fathom, because an adult act may spring from a childish motive, or a childish act from an adult motive. And almost inextricably are childhood and manhood mixed in every thought and act of the educated or semi-educated black.

"It is no pretense, Mohamed Ali," responded Habib slowly and seriously, looking Mohamed Ali full in the eyes. "You scoff at *djinnoon*—in the face of their performed marvels. My *djinnoon* told me that you were coming down the street outside my door, arrayed as a beggar. My *djinnoon* told me that you risked your life because that risk was necessary; that Hadj Hosein held a letter which might mean your death—or his. And they told me, also, that Hadj Hosein now dines with the *khalifa*—and that he plans with him how the letter may be used."

"Some I can follow," said Mohamed Ali, rubbing his chin and staring into the candle flame. "*If* you knew that Hadj Hosein had such a letter—even I could judge that he would take it to the *khalifa*—and plot with him. They are known intimates. But—but——"

A smile brushed across the face of Habib, as swiftly as the shadow of a seagull races across a sandy beach.

"But—that is only one feather in a large bird," ended Mohamed Ali.

"And a very small feather, at that," agreed Habib.

He reached for a book which lay upon a little, gaudily painted box—a big book, stoutly bound in heavy, dark leather—and opened it to one of its many yellowed and finger-worn pages. Mohamed Ali saw that the page was covered with written Arabic inscriptions and queer symbolical drawings.

"This book," said Habib, "is the Book of Magic of Hadj Ibn Nosair, who lived in the days when Mulai Ismail was Sultan—and worked wonders in those days. I am of his family—and I have the book. There is no other, no copy. Hadj Ibn Nosair learned the secrets of the *djinnoon*, and became their master. And from his written book, I have given them another master."

He turned his eyes full upon those of Mohamed Ali, and in their dark depths the outlaw saw little flashings, as of tiny lightnings. He pulled himself away from their mystic attraction with an effort. Hypnotism is not unknown in Morocco, and Mohamed Ali knew many things.

"Very good, Sid Habib," he said. "I do not question your mastership of the *djinnoon* but while that is very interesting—time passes. I have two things to accomplish this night. One is to get that letter from the person of Hadj Hosein. The other——"

He paused, and Habib completed his thought.

"The other," said the magician, "is to ascertain the purpose of one Sid Habib in taking a hand in the affairs of Mohamed Ali."

"A true guess," agreed the outlaw. "And the sooner that explanation is forthcoming, the better Mohamed Ali will be—satisfied."

"Listen, then," said the magician, "and the reason shall be made plain. Mohamed Ali thinks that he, alone, has an enemy in Hadj Hosein. Such is error. Once—many years ago—Hadj Hosein was not Hadj Hosein of Tangier, but Hadj Larbi ben Susa, of Marraksh city. And Habib, now Master of the *Djinnoon*, was only Habib, a youth who worked in Hadj Larbi's garden—and who had a sister whom he loved very dearly. The sister died—after many things had happened. And before the youth became a man, to repay, Hadj Larbi no longer lived in Marraksh, nor bore that name. The matter becomes more clear?"

"Clearer—clearer," agreed Mohamed Ali. "Save for the things which are not clear at all."

"And so it comes about, as my *djinnoon* informed me, that Mohamed Ali comes seeking a certain letter, and the time of my vengeance accompanies Mohamed Ali. Thus I waited for you in the street—and thus, through my *djinnoon*, I knew of your errand."

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Mohamed Ali shrugged his shoulders.

"Part I believe, and part—I do not believe. But whether your magic told you these things, or whether they came to you otherwise, I have still to get my letter, and you have still to avenge your sister."

"And how did Mohamed Ali plan to secure the letter?" asked Habib, and there was ridicule in his tones. "To ask Hadj Hosein to give it over to him?"

"To find the dog and take it from him—together with his life, if necessary," answered Mohamed Ali quickly.

"A good plan, indeed," agreed Habib, "were it not for the fact that Hadj Hosein travels abroad only with a guard, and that entry to his house would be as easy as—as entrance into Paradise."

Now Mohamed Ali had come on his errand with little hope in his heart, and it angered him to have his own doubts thus displayed.

"Perhaps, then," he said, "it is best to sit here upon your cushions and wait for the fame of the Master of the *Djinnoon* to bring to his house the person of Hadj Hosein, seeking enlightenment upon matters occult."

He started to rise, but the hand of the magician fell upon his knee.

"And would you like that Hadj Hosein should come to this house?"

"While I am still here, yes, by Allah!" growled Mohamed Ali. "Or that he would send the letter to me and then die swiftly," he mocked.

But his scorn did not perturb the Black Magician.

"It shall be as you wish," he said slowly, solemnly. "Not so much because of the letter as because of my vengeance. Not so much because of your unbelief in my *djinnoon* as that you may be convinced of their powers. My spirits shall summon Hadj Hosein, and he shall come, bringing with him the letter—and his own fate. Now may Mohamed Ali be silent, while I give the necessary orders."

Mohamed Ali, incredulous but perplexed as to what move to make next, watched his host. From the painted box the magician took a little brass bowl, inscribed with heiroglyphics and strange figures. In it he placed a pinch of a brown powder. Making a squill of paper, he ignited it at a candle, and then touched it to the powder. A thin stream of dense gray smoke rose like a rod until it touched the ceiling and spread out like an umbrella.

Then Habib opened the book again, and began a slow mumbling, while his forefinger traced the outlines of a mystic diagram. Mohamed Ali, listening, could catch no word clear-cut. He watched the smoke rise, straight as a young sapling. And then, as he watched, the smoke stream stopped as though cut by a knife—the smoke stem vanished—then rose again—vanished and rose for a third time.

"The *djinnoon* answer my call," said the magician, pointing a black finger at the smoke stream.

But Mohamed Ali rubbed his eyes and looked elsewhere. A little while thereafter the magician closed the book and laid it beside him.

"Hadj Hosein will be here in a quarter of an hour," he stated. "He has already left the house of the *khalifa*."

Mohamed Ali preserved a discreet silence. When the quarter hour was ended he, Mohamed Ali, would go forth from this house of child's play, and seek Hadj Hosein as he should be sought. In the mean time——

He fell to trying to piece together the puzzle of Sid Habib's information.

He came from his reverie with a start, as the noise of horse's hoofs echoed down the street.

"HE COMES alone," said Habib.

A knock sounded upon the door. Mohamed Ali said nothing. But over his eyes he pulled the hood of his *djellaba*, and rested his head upon his knees as one sleeping.

The black magician drew the great iron bolt, and Hadj Hosein stepped through the doorway.

Hadj Hosein, after Habib had again shot the bolt, looked the Black Magician up and down.

"So," he said, "you are he who is known as Master of the *Djinnoon*."

Habib bowed slightly.

"I come from curiosity," went on Hadj Hosein, "nothing more. They tell me you perform clever tricks—sleight-of-hand—and such things. But who is that?"

He nodded at the figure of Mohamed Ali.

"My brother," answered Habib. "He is tired. He sleeps. Yes—it is as you say: I perform—tricks. Although some call them miracles."

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"There are fools in this world yet," responded Hadj Hosein. "One of my secretaries calls them miracles—even as you say. He was to have come with me, only he fell suddenly ill."

"That would be—Sid Abdeslem Senussi," observed Habib quietly.

Hadj Hosein tensed.

"How—how do you know that?" he asked.

"My *djinnoon* tell me all things I wish to know," replied Habib. "Such, for example, as the fact that you carry in your *shakarah* a letter which concerns Mohamed Ali."

A convulsive gesture of Hadj Hosein's hand gave assent to this charge. But the hand swerved a little, and sought the jeweled hilt of a *kumiah*, while the blood rushed to Hadj Hosein's face.

The Master of the *Djinnoon* made no movement, but smiled mystically for a moment into the flushed face of his visitor. Then his eyes narrowed, and the little lightnings played again in them, and the eyes of Hadj Hosein were caught and held as in the coils of a serpent. He licked his lips and made efforts to swallow, and the sweat sprang to the palms of his hands. The voice of the Black Magician tolled now like a bell.

"Hadj Hosein," it rang, "Hadj Larbi ben Susa"— the breath of Hadj Hosein came in gasps—"violator and murderer of my sister. I am Habib of Marraksh city. Tonight my vengeance is at hand. Tonight you die. There are hands about your throat now—invisible hands choking the breath from your nostrils. Give me the letter concerning Mohamed Ali."

The command came like the crack of a whip.

Without a sound, his hands moving like those of an automaton, Hadj Hosein reached into the folds of his garments and brought forth the letter. Habib tossed it over his shoulder—and, as though it had sentient wings, it fluttered through the air and fell at the feet of Mohamed Ali. The eyes of the magician never left those of Hadj Hosein; the voice now boomed again.

"Yes; the time of your death is at hand. You will go from this house—in a moment. You will reach the big shadow at the turn of the street outside. Then and there you will cease to live. Go!"

Like a sleep-walker Hadj Hosein turned and went toward the door. Mohamed Ali, head uncovered now, watched incredulously, half-decided to interfere in this freeing of their joint enemy. But, without seeing him, Habib raised a warning hand.

"He shall die, even as I have said," he assured him. "And you will be innocent of his blood."

Hadj Hosein reached the door, drew the bolt, and went out, leaving the door open behind him. Mohamed Ali came and stood in the portal with the Master of the *Djinnoon*. They saw Hadj Hosein, ignoring his waiting horse, stumble down the street, saw him reach the big shadow, lost him in it; and then heard one wild shrill of fright—of death.

"That is the end," said Habib slowly. "My *djinnoon* have served their master."

Mohamed Ali, the letter in his belt, held out the hand of parting.

"You have my gratitude," he said. "And there are in truth many things I do not understand. But let them pass. Whenever you need Mohamed Ali's aid——"

"My *djinnoon*," said Habib with a little smile, "will bring it to me."

"As fast as I can come," agreed Mohamed Ali, and shuffled down the street—but not in the direction of the shadows.

At the turn he paused a moment and looked back.

"*I* think," he observed, "that Hadj Hosein's secretary is the key to some of this puzzle. And I have heard that Hadj Hosein's heart was not strong. To shock him, then to make him afraid, and then—the little lightnings in Habib's eyes. Assuredly there are many things which those facts do not explain. But I have my letter—and I have a feeling that I am not yet entirely finished with the Master of the *Djinnoon*." He resumed his journey. "I am not quite certain," he added, "that I greatly desire further dealings with such as he. But—if he sends his *djinnoon* for me——"

He laughed—but there was a quaver in his laughter.

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MAD WELLS

by CHARLES VICTOR FISCHER

Author of "The Daddy of Eight Hundred," "Cold Turkey," etc.

"SHORTY" SCOTT, the little chief electrician who was kingpin of the radio-gang on the cruiser *Farallone*, had a reputation for being a good little sport, so long as a man didn't rub him wrong. Once he sprouted ill-feeling against a man in his gang, that member's next move was to get transferred to some other ship—failing in that, run away.

When Shorty said, "Nothing doing!" that afternoon at the quarter-deck rail, Jack Wells, who, temporarily, was one of the gobs in Shorty's gang, should have dropped it right there.

Jack, however, had not been on the ship long enough to know Shorty. Strictly, Jack was only a passenger on the ship. He had been transferred to the *Farallone* at Manilla, for further transfer to San Francisco on one of the army transports, the transport to be intercepted by the *Farallone* at Vladivostok.

What nettled Shorty was the insistence in Jack's over-the-horizon eyes. When he said yes or no to a man Shorty liked to be taken at his word. This big, loose-boned, queer, foreheaded nut had an irritating way of trying to force over his argument.

"Just once, chief," he coaxed. "Let me try it out tonight on the mid-watch."

Shorty squared away aggressively.

"Young fellow," he began, "you can't put it over; not on this ship. I said *no!* There'll be no monkeying with that receiving-set. And don't make me say it again."

The dreamer's eyes were on the blurred horizon—or something beyond that—as he answered:

"All right, chief. That settles it. I know how you feel about it. The receiver is in O. K. order; working good——"

"—and she's going to stay that way," Shorty finished for him, "as long as I'm in charge of this ship's radio."

Jack Wells continued gazing afar, in silence. He was tall, big-boned, but thin. His head seemed too heavy for him, also his feet and hands. He was anything but a beau-ideal. Put a beard on him and smooth off his bulging forehead, and you'd have a living image of Abraham Lincoln.

"You see, Wells," Shorty went on, unbending a little, "that receiver of ours is a complicated baby. She's got a thousand things inside of her that you dasn't touch. She's a peach—best on Asiatic waters; but the minute you start to monkey with her insides she refuses duty. If you were chief you'd feel just as I do about it."

Jack grinned.

"A chief? Me? I'll never be one, Shorty. I'll be paid off in another month, and I wouldn't come back if they made me an admiral."

He bent over, thrusting his broad face close to that of Shorty's.

"Suppose you were in my boots?"

"Young fellow, I wouldn't be in your boots," was Shorty's prompt return. "When I begin to get an idea that I can take the static out of radio telegraphy—" He

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hesitated. "Yes, I think the next thing I'll do is buy a gun, because I'd a lot rather be a corpse than a lunatic."

Shorty paused, noting that his words had made no impression. The gray eyes were again looking far off into space, and the heavy overhanging forehead was uncreased.

"You can't rid radio telegraphy of static," Shorty went on. "You can't cut down the static without cutting down the signals too. When you tackle static you're just ramming a stone wall head-on."

"That's what they said about aircraft not so many years ago," Jack reminded him.

"So they did." Shorty then broke off impatiently. "Trying to argue a wild idea out of a wild man's head is bumping a stone wall too." He laughed. "All right, Wells. You've got a right to think, I guess. I don't mind grinning and agreeing with all that deep stuff of yours—but I can't help telling you that all your diagrams and mathematics are like high-flown Chinese to me. But all that aside, I believe you; I take your word for it that you've got a static eliminator. To —— with what all the radio wizards say; you've got the dope that'll close all their traps—right in that big suit-case."

Shorty paused to stretch himself so that his mouth came up close to his subordinate's right ear; then finished:

"But don't try it out on this ship, Wells! If I catch you opening up that receiving-set, you'll never make that transport out of Vladivostok; you'll be held over, waiting the action of a general court martial!"

After which Shorty turned and strutted across the deck.

Jack stood watching him. The expression on his face seldom changed. At a glance he was nothing more than a stupid, scowling dreamer. Look close and you saw the mental turmoil in his gray, deep-sunk eyes. He seemed to be ever reaching out for something. At length he slouched forward.

Close on Shorty's heels, as he crossed the deck, waddled two hundred pounds of Irish-American—"Frisky" Malone, a chief water-tender. Frisky had been listening to Jack and Shorty.

"Say, Shortty, what's that shtuff you call shtatic annyway?" he questioned.

Shorty swung about and faced him with a grin.

"Static? That's the one little joker that'll always be a thorn in the sides of radio experts," he elucidated. "Static is the stuff that keeps the cable companies in business."

"Oh, is that so?"

Shorty laughed.

"Tell you, Frisky, it's pretty hard to explain."

"I think I have ordinary intilligince," Frisky snapped, pulling out his pipe.

"You wouldn't be Irish if you didn't," Shorty sought to conciliate. "Why—static, Frisky, is another name for the electrical discharges in the atmosphere. There's all kinds of it—barkers, grinders, hissers, crunchers. Comes in the receiving-phones and blocks out the signals. Sometimes it sounds like rapid-firing guns; sometimes like some one ripping a pair of underdrawers.

"I'll let you listen to it some night when it's bad. We don't get much of it up here. Down around Manila it get so bad at times that you can't copy a ship sending on full power only a short distance away. It's the electric storms in the air."

"An' there's no way o' gittin' rid of it?"

"Can't be done. A crack operator is the nearest they've ever come to the solution. Some fellows can work through it better than others. For instance, that fellow 'Blackie' we used to have; he was a bear for static. But I've seen him throw up both hands too. When it gets so bad that every crash paralyzes the audion-bulb——"

"An' is that what this feller Wells was talkin' to you about?"

Shorty looked up quickly.

"Say, what do you think of that bird?"

Frisky was lighting his pipe. "I don't know the lad," he answered between puffs. "Sames to be a clane, quiet kind of a feller."

"Only trouble with him is he's sunburned inside of his head," stated Shorty. "He's been out here too long. It may work out of him after he gets back in the States awhile. But I figure a man that begins talking about a static eliminator is pretty near hopeless.

"He's got a big suit-case——"

"I sane him bring it aboard in Manila," Frisky put in.

"Yeah? Well, inside of that he's got a static eliminator. He's got about a million feet of magnet-wire, wound into about a hundred small coils. They're all packed in there solid, along with a lot of other stuff,

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such as condensers, batteries, horseshoe magnets. There's enough packed in that suit-case to start in the junk business with. It's all he can do to lift it. That's his static eliminator. He just finished it this morning. Took him two years, he says.

"He wants to hook that death-trap in with our receiving-set. Claims he can keep out the static without weakening the signals. —— jackass!

"I wouldn't mind letting him try it, just to convince him he's a nut; but, the way he explained it to me, we'd have to take our whole receiver apart. And right there I balk. You know, Frisky, I feel about the same toward that receiver as I do my right arm."

"But supposin', Shortty, that in a year or so you find out there wos a way o' gittin' rid of that shtatic?"

"Never will."

"An' supposin' this death-trrap, which this lad has, is the little —— that pulled the shtunt?"

Shorty laughed. "Frisky—this fellow is absolutely useless. He can't operate. The stuff he sends is rotten; he's worse than an old woman at receiving. He's helpless with tools. Put a hammer in his hand and he'll hit himself on the nose with it."

"Them's the kind o' fellers that puts over the big ideas," Frisky asserted flatly.

"I know, I know." With which Shorty turned the argument. "We'll be in Vladivostok tomorrow afternoon," he announced. "The old man sent a message ordering tugs, so we must be going alongside the dock. Hits me just right. Over the gangway and I'm in the city. No boats——"

"I wonder can a man get a good glass o' beer up there."

PATIENCE. Jack Wells had wooed her for two years. With slow method and precision he had studied and toiled over his big idea; had built it up step by step, winding and shellacking coil after coil, sawing up silver dollars into contact-studs, making tiny hair-wire connections, filing, sandpapering; he had sat up pondering over diagrams and figures until the black spots came—and all this when he should have been in his hammock, or on shore-liberty. But never once had he been in a hurry to put it through. Up to the soldering of the last tiny connection within that "death-trap," he had worked with a patience that was pathetic.

Not an inch of hair-fine wire, nor a square millimeter of paper-thin copper surface within that death-trap that his mathematician's brain had not calculated upon. The stress and polarity of each infinitesimal magnetic field and cross-field and superposed field; the mutual influence of coil on coil, inductance, capacity—every little unit packed in that death-trap balanced mathematically; every tiny ramification had been worked out to its umpty-umpth root.

Patience! All around the Asiatic circuit —at Guam, Samoa, the Philippines, and the few ships he had been on—they keep these monomaniacs on the move—they spoke in sad tones of "Mad" Wells, the "poor devil with the death-trap."

Jack Wells had not minded all that. It gave him no pain. Patience—that was his watchword.

But now the death-trap was finished; ready for a tryout. Away with Patience! He was weary of her!

He had the mid-watch tonight. He knew not when he would get another opportunity; for he was leaving the ship upon arrival at Vladivostok. Thirty days on the army transport stared him in the face. Those soldier-operators on the transports were pretty good fellows. They might permit him to hook in his death-trap—again, they might not. The Navy didn't have a monopoly on Shorties.

All this went round and round behind the bulge of Jack's forehead, as he hung over the forecastle rail that evening, waiting for midnight. He hadn't swung his hammock —hadn't thought of it. Many a sleep—meal too—had gone glimmering for the same reason.

Jack was weighing and considering. To hook in, or not to hook in? That was the question. There was flashing-eyed Shorty, with his threatened general court martial on the one hand; on the other, an indefinite period of heart-corroding patience.

The moon grinned and the stars danced in a clear sky, while below him the water swirled and roared and hissed queer words and phrases, now and then spraying up in his face.

To know, or not to know. In that valise, packed with coils, condensers, batteries—"junk"—in that death-trap Jack Wells thought he had the solution to a problem of the many; and, through that medium, the once-and-for-all solution of his own.

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Thought, be it understood. He was almost but not quite, positive.

With the death-trap hooked in—connected with the receiver—and the phones on his ears—then he would *know* whether all that toil, worry, brain-stretching, seeing of black spots—whether it had all been wise endeavor, or so much jackassery; whether he was going back to the Outside next month to loll and feast and dance, or to toil and crawl with the rest of the ants, as he had done before he came into the Navy.

"Take a chance! Take a chance!" churned the water against the ship's side, again and again.

What mattered the microscopic prejudices of a chief electrician? If the death-trap proved a success Shorty wouldn't have a leg to stand on! And if the fine-spun theories of the masters, the makers of text-books were trustworthy, then the death-trap would be a success!

"And if—" he told himself this as he went on watch that night—"and if the death-trap fails, I'll tie it around my neck and jump over the side."

And that death-trap weighed all of two hundred pounds.

AT A quarter past twelve, when the midnight yells and growls had subsided, and the last of the watch was relieved and in his hammock, Jack Wells poked his head out of the radio-office door, and peered long and searchingly into the darkness of the gun-deck.

Hammocks, swinging slightly with the ship's roll, was all he could see. But noise! The deck was a very bedlam of slide trombone and foghorn sounds. Never had he been in a ship's company that snored so!

"Sounds like static," he grinned, and closed the door.

He would have locked that door; but Shorty had the key.

The next moment he was dragging from beneath the desk that two-hundred-pound valise in which was packed the very latest invention in radio telegraphy; the next, lifting it up on to the desk; the next, unlocking and opening out the lid.

There it was—the idea crystallized. Two years' work all packed in a valise. To look at, nothing but a bag stuffed full of junk—layers and layers of tiny spools of wire; rows of sheet-copper plates; a bundle of small dry batteries in one corner; along one side, a row of audion-bulbs; while leading up out of the mass were myriad loose ends of wire, these all twisted into a bunch and tucked in a corner. Nothing but junk, yes; but the concrete result of twenty-four months' blood-sweating toil, just the same.

Now for the showdown. Either the world was his oyster, or he was what they called him—a mad jackass.

And yet, for many minutes he hesitated, screw-driver in hand, Shorty's flashing eyes in his mind's forefront, while he contemplated the elaborate receiving-set he was about to dismantle. It was a long chance. What if Shorty should get a hunch? Shorty was subject to those things. Thus he wavered the minutes away, till at last, hunger for achievement overrode apprehension, and off came the outside leads—those to the antenna, ground, and audion-box. Then he went at the screws that held the panel in place.

His first glance at the intricate tangle and maze within that large polished box brought him to another halt. This was no ordinary receiving-set that any one with a rudimentary knowledge of the game could handle. Even an expert might pause without shame before such a labyrinth.

"She's sure a puzzler," he mused, scratching the back of his neck. "She's no kid's toy."

However, the thought of the blue-print in the desk-drawer reassured him. Never yet had he seen the receiver he couldn't hook up, when he had the blue-print before him. And he went to it.

He took that receiver apart so thoroughly that its own designer would have been stumped to reassemble it.

That was easy. But then commenced the most ticklish part of the whole two-year task—connecting his death-trap with the receiving-set. It took time. Not a detail, now, that could be overlooked. Crossing wires must not touch. All ends must be scraped bright to insure perfect contact. Each connection must be made with minute thoroughness and exactness, and carefully verified by the diagram pasted on the inside of the lid of the valise. It was slow work.

Time was flying. But Mad Wells, like the boy building his house of blocks, had ceased to be conscious of time.

After each connection he paused to rub

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his big bony hands over the maze and muddle, like a miser gloating over his glittering pile.

He was nearing the end. Yes, the end—that was it—the end of Mad Wells, the poor —— with the death-trap. He would cease to be. Gone and good riddance.

A new Jack Wells coming into being. Born in the radio-office of a big cruiser off the Siberian coast one early morning in June.

All the poverty and misery of his past faded over the horizon of consciousness—along with Shorty's face. Vivid images of automobiles, yachts, great brownstone houses appeared in a sort of whirligig about him. He saw polished floors, costly hangings, festoons of lights, and flowers, and bells that were jingling, jingling, jingling. He lolled in deep velvet, swelling volumes of music in his ears. There was wine at his elbow; wine that was red and rich and mellow—good old aged stuff that only rich men and Jack Wells could buy. And there were women. They seemed to come automatically—or rather, magnetically. Life was good.

"That's Jack Wells. Fellow invented the great wireless device. Money! Him? Barrels!"

Jack shook his head. The great vision remained. He dealt himself a vicious jab on the wrist with the screwdriver. It hurt like——. It *did* hurt!

No dream, this. These pictures were not hallucinations. Nay, nay. Previsions. It was the work of tricky Fate. Now that he had her beaten at her own rotten game, she was seeking to propitiate, trying to cover up the rotten treatment she had handed him from the very beginning, by holding back the curtain and allowing him a peep into the glories of the future. As if he owed her anything! As if he'd forget her dirty tricks! To —— with her!

The last connection was made. The death-trap was hooked in. The great moment of emancipation was at hand. No longer one of the suckers, the ants that crawl and toil that Fate's Favored Few might loll and feast and dance.

Two moves remained—put on the phones, and throw the antenna-transfer switch. Either might be performed first. Ordinarily an operator would put on the phones, then throw the switch. But not so now. Mad Wells knew his death-trap. In his mind of minds were seared the words—

The phones last!

He pushed back all the tools; cleared away everything. Then he reached out to the antenna-transfer switch and brought it down with a *clump*.

Pst-pst-pst-spat. Br-rr-rr-rrickety-crunch. Ss-ss-ss-fat-fat-fat. Br-rr-rr-rroom.

Static! The phones, still on the desk, had become things of life! They were fairly a-roar with noises—barkers, hissers, grinders, crunchers!

"Throw that switch! Throw it, you —— jackass! You'll burn the set up!"

Shorty it was, barking over his shoulder.

"Throw it! Throw it!"

Jack felt himself being jostled aside, saw Shorty reach in and throw the switch that disconnected the combination death-trap-and-receiver from the antenna, then thrust his hand among the tangle and feel of the coils.

"Feel of 'em! Feel of 'em!"

Jack ran his hand in and felt of the coils.

"Little warm," was all he said.

And then he began breaking connections. One, two, three of the tiny wires he tore out.

"Leave that mess alone!" Shorty snarled. And as Jack broke the fourth connection, Shorty grasped a handful of his jumper-collar and pulled him away from the desk. The next moment the little chief had circled about him and stood with his back to the desk, holding the screwdriver above his head.

"She stays just as she is, Wells!" he shouted. "I told you to keep your useless paws out of this receiver! And now it's up to you!"

"STATIC eliminator, eh?" Shorty stood with head cocked to one side, glaring down upon Jack's death-trap. "I'd call it static amplifier."

Jack made no reply. He sat on the edge of the chair, his big "useless" hands on his big bony knees, his jaw hanging low, his far-away eyes scowling at the bottom of the ocean.

"Young fellow," Shorty went on, "that's the sorriest attempt I ever saw at taking the static out of wireless. Man, you better get hold of yourself! First thing you know they'll have you in a nut-farm!"

Jack remained silent. A bunch of keys fell with a jingle in his lap.

"Go down to the storeroom and break out that old receiving-set," Shorty ordered.

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"Bring it up. We'll have to work with that for a while."

By which Shorty indicated that he was in earnest about leaving the mess just as it was for the radio officer to look at.

Jack stood up.

"Of course," he smiled, "if you merely want to ease off your spite——"

"I don't, you lunatic! All I want is to see you get off the ship!"

"Then why not let me put the set together again?"

"Because you can't! Neither can I! Because the blue-print's lost—and this set is a complicated baby!"

There was fire in Shorty's eyes as he snapped off this confession. It was a startler. Jack only stared.

"See now, Jackass?" Shorty continued. "That blue-print got away from me some time back. I don't know how. I never reported it because I figured it'd look bad for me. I wrote, on my own hook, I wrote to the people that make these receivers asking for another. I don't know when it'll come. But that's why I made it so plain to you yesterday not to monkey with it."

"Well, I'm sure sorry, Shorty."

"That don't get either of us a thing."

"No," Jack agreed; "but if you'd told me——"

"I told you to keep out of the guts of this receiver!" Shorty exploded. Then after a moment's pause—

"I thought you were a man a fellow could trust."

"You did?" Jack grinned. "Then why did you sneak in on me? When I trust a man——"

"Beat it down and get that old receiver," Shorty cut him off. "The radio officer and the captain'll listen to you. Bring that set up. We'll hook it in over on that other desk. After that outside for yours. For the rest of your stay on this ship I'll see that you keep out of this office."

A STRANGE silence prevailed about the decks of the *Farallone* as she steamed slowly into Vladivostok Harbor next day. To the gobs manning the upper-deck rails it seemed the ship had entered some forbidden zone. Midday, mid-June, the sun riding high in a clear blue sky—yet something heavy hung in the air; something all-pervading that penetrated to the roots and strummed into vibration the deeper strings of a man's being and made him feel sad. As if, up out of the long packed mass of buildings that rose from the water's edge up the towering hill, Darkest Russia breathed her ages and ages of tragic melancholy—so it seemed.

There it was—Siberia's gateway. The door that was bringing the butcher and grocer to a starving people; but also many alien ships-of-war—ships that just came in and anchored, and held pointing practice with their big guns every day, using the buildings here and there up the hill as targets. Just for practise, of course; but it didn't look friendly.

Frisky Malone said:

"It 'minds me o' so miny rrats, shtickin' around waitin' for the finish of a frree-for-ahl cat fight. Look at the gang o' thim, will you!"

There were two Japanese battleships, one Chinese cruiser, one Italian gunboat, one French battleship, one British cruiser, and two Americans, the *Farallone* and the army transport.

"'Tis a foin way to impriss it on these poor people that the rist o' the worruld is tryin' to help thim on their feet. A foin wilcome these people will have for us. They'll be shtickin' their knives in the backs of us, pizening our guzzlings. Say I wonder can a man git a good glass o' beer up here."

"I know one that can't," spoke up Jack Wells. "His name is Wells. He stays aboard."

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"I thought you was bein' transferred to the transport."

"I was, up till that mid-watch last night," Jack grinned. "As it is now I don't know when I'll get paid off. Shorty's got me down on two counts: Destruction of Government property, and direct disobedience. I'm a prisoner at large, and I stand a good chance of landing a court martial."

"Well that's not plisant," Frisky admitted. "An' how is your shtatic machine?"

"Haven't seen it since about three o'clock this morning," Jack laughed. "I left Shorty standing watch over it with a screwdriver. I'm banished from the radio-room."

Here the bugler sounded quarters. A few minutes later the gobs were lined up in military array. Two tugs came alongside to dock the *Farallone*.

NOT in many a day had Jack Wells felt so blue as he did that afternoon. Here was the ship alongside the pier—a steady stream of gobs easing over the gangway on liberty—and he up at the topside rail watching them, watching them check out on the quarter-deck, swagger down the gangway, up the pier, up past the big warehouse that was being used for a Y. M. C. A., and on up toward Vladivostok's "Main Drag," as they were calling it. And deeply insistent was the urge to go.

He was hearing things—reports of the few who had been over on duty—the mail-orderly, commissary steward.

"There's oodles to see over there," they were saying. "You hear 'em talkin' every language in the world. Soldiers and flat-feet every way you look. There's guys with long beards, and garlic-flavored breaths, with strings of sausages hangin' out of their pockets. You can't savvey the lingo from the signs and so on, because half of the letters are upside down, and the rest are phoney. But, boy, the dames! Most bee-autiful girls in the world!"

All of which was neither here nor there. Jack Wells was on report; which meant that he would be restricted to the ship till he came up before Daddy Doone, the captain. No liberty for Jack till Daddy Doone held "mast" (court) and heard his case. Daddy might not hold mast for a month! By then the ship might be at the North Pole! And Jack wanted to go ashore, and mix with that moving mass of uniforms and long beards and garlic odor and bee-autiful faces up on the Main Drag.

The forward gangway, unguarded as it was, looked inviting. But before that idea worked out, a string of circumstances rendered "jumping ship" unnecessary.

He presently found himself on a ditty-box outside the radio-office door. In the face of Shorty's interdict to "Stay out!" he couldn't go inside of the office. And Shorty had not gone ashore yet.

The door opened and "Slats" Withers, one of the radio-operators, emerged, all flat-hatted and dolled out for a beachward dash.

"What's the dope?" Jack hailed him.

"Oh, nothin' much," Slats answered hurriedly. "Shorty stuck you down. Your death-trap is in there just like you left it."

"What did the radio officer say?"

"On'y laughed."

With which Slats backed away aft.

"He's in there now, studyin' over them diagrams you got pasted on the inside of the lid. He's tryin' to figure out where the connections go—the ones you broke when Shorty snuck in on you. Shorty sure is red-eyed. Ain't done nothin' but rave all day. Roop! 'Scuse me, sir."

Here Slats, backing away, collided with Paymaster Dolby. It was not a head-on, but a shoulder-to-shoulder collision. The paymaster, too, was moving aft, his attention on a package of envelops in his hand.

"That's all right," he laughed, and the two proceeded aft toward the quarter-deck.

Jack saw an envelop fall from the paymaster's hand. He called out; but there was much of clattering racket along the deck—men borrowing one another's socks, hats, shoes—and "Pay" did not hear. Whereupon he stepped over and picked it up. It was a long, broad Manila envelop, thickly stuffed and sealed.

He started after the paymaster with it; but moved only a few steps. And then—almost in a wink, it came—an idea. For a few moments he pondered that idea. Then he proceeded to execute it.

He stepped aft to the doorway leading out on to the quarter-deck. The paymaster stood near the gangway talking to the officer of the deck. Apparently Pay was going ashore, probably to order provisions. Jack wanted to do that little thing himself—go ashore.

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At length Pay stepped over the gangway. Jack watched him till he was well up the pier—till Pay was about to disappear round the big warehouse—the Y. M. C. A. Then he stepped up to the officer of the deck and, holding up the envelop, said:

"Paymaster Dolby dropped this, sir. I yelled at him, but he didn't bear me. I couldn't chase after him, because I was busy changing my shoes at the moment."

He paused, glancing up the pier.

"I can catch him in a minute, sir——"

"Go ahead; see if you can," responded the officer of the deck.

And Jack stood not upon the order.

Down over the gangway he galloped. He continued galloping till he had rounded the big warehouse—the Y—till he was out of the line-of-sight from the quarter-deck. Then he halted.

Not far up the street, moving up the hill toward the Main Drag, he made out the broad, swinging shoulders of Paymaster Dolby. To catch him and deliver the envelop would have taken not many seconds. But that was not the idea.

Jack was in no hurry to catch Pay. He didn't think that envelop contained matter of an urgent nature. Why not just stroll about for an hour, two, three, or four; and finally return aboard with the undelivered envelop, having lost Pay in the scramble and helter-skelter over there. Easy enough.

He entered the crowded canteen of the Y. M. C. A., and mingled with more soldiers, sailors, and marines than ever he had before. Never had he seen such a mix-up of uniforms. There were gobs, gobs, gobs—Italian, French, British, Yankee. Soldiers—Czecho-Slovaks, Japanese, British, Americans; "Red" marines and blue marines. A great gathering it was. And it was good to be ashore—even if he was only, as he was, technically, ashore on duty.

Languishing in solitary snugness in one of his pockets was a twenty-dollar bill. For this the man at the money-exchange desk in the Y. gave him what looked like an enormity of wealth in cigaret coupons. He had two hundred rubles—the rate of exchange being ten for one at that time.

"Not so bad," he soliloquized, not many minutes later, as he moved along the Main Drag.

He had always thought a ruble was the equivalent to something between fifty and seventy-five cents. Evidently not so now. But that was all right. He was happy as it was.

And he would have continued happy had not Fate once more thrust in her tricky face.

On the corner of the Main Drag and another street—a street half the letters of which were upside down and the rest phoney—right on that corner Jack came face to face with Paymaster Dolby.

The paymaster nodded. His face was pale, drawn; and in his eyes was the look of a worried man. He was moving toward that street at the foot of which the *Farallone* was moored; and moving as it behooves a man in a hurry to move.

Jack halted, turned, and stood looking after him. To deliver, or not to deliver the envelop? Never yet had he seen it to fail! The minute things began to look good, along came Fate with her wet blanket! Barely started on his liberty when *smash* went the whole thing!

He couldn't pass up Pay, after Pay had seen and recognized him. There was but one thing to do—catch Pay and give him his envelop. After that he would have to return aboard, because he would have no excuse to offer for remaining ashore. Too bad he had to meet Pay in that way.

With which disappointing thoughts in his head, his long arms dangling loosely, the big Manila envelop in his hand. Jack set out in pursuit of Paymaster Dolby.

VERILY a forsaken city, this Vladivostok. Poverty, misery, brute force, arrogance were in evidence every way Jack looked. He saw thin, haggard beggars and cripples and blind people. They slouched along wearily, or sat on door-steps. Some of them were so ragged and emaciated that he marveled in that the poor things could want to live on. They had no hope. Ignorance, starvation, kicks—such their fate. Big iron-framed, garlic and vodka-breathed policemen, whose business, apparently, was to push and kick people into the gutters, stalked bravely up and down, keeping the poor wretches on the move. No one cared. It was a land where the dog-eat-dog doctrine prevailed.

He was following close on Paymaster Dolby's heels, just about to hand over that envelop, when Chance threw another twist into the rope of events.

These big bull-dozers that stalked up and

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down pushing poor unfortunates into the gutter—they grated on Jack's inners. Gradually he had been generating that feeling of boiling inside. Several times in the short period he had been ashore had he felt prompted to hurl discretion to the winds and let fly one of his big bony fists. It would be good to hear the smack of a fellow's own fist against one of these arrogant jaws, or to close one of these vicious pairs of eyes.

But of course, he reasoned, such a stunt would be the act of a fool. A fellow could hardly get away with it. No chance for the hit-and-run game on these crowded streets. Cops were too numerous. No; he wanted to, but didn't dare. Complications would follow, too. It would mean another charge—"brawling ashore"—added to the two of Shorty's, when he came up before Daddy Doone. No, sir. It would not do.

Just the same he did it.

A poor, thin, hollow-eyed little woman, rag-clad and carrying a baby, being gruffly ordered and pushed along the Main Drag by one of those burly garlic eaters, and—

"Say, Bushface, where do you get that noise?"

Bushface blinked total absence of comprehension.

"You big skunk!"

And with that Jack let fly. A thud, a crash—and the Siberian was prone on the sidewalk.

Had Shorty Scott seen that masterful delivery he would have retracted then and there every word he had ever spoken concerning the uselessness of Mad Wells.

Frisky Malone, not twenty feet away, witnessed the swinging of that wallop. It was the neatest act he had ever seen in all his forty-two years. It stirred the Irish in him—the whole two hundred pounds of it. For a few seconds he stood there grinning. The *thump-thump* of many heavy footfalls broke on his ears. He saw two, three, then four burly cops dancing about, trying to break inside of Jack Wells' long swinging arms. And then, all of a sudden, Frisky was in it himself.

Gobs, gobs! They came from all directions, those *Farallone* flatfeet; came, in a glance sized things up—noted that the mix-up was between the cops and their shipmates—and pitched right in.

Whether scrubbing decks, or shining bright-work, or washing his clothes, or pointing the guns, or just going ashore—the American tar does nothing by halves. Hammer-and-tongs and make a good job of it—that is the big idea with him.

Against that hurricane of blue, those cops had not one chance in a million of landing Jack Wells behind bars.

Those were wild moments. In that tangle and hurly-burly a man got it from where he wasn't expecting it. With their clubs and broad heavy swords, the cops held the advantage. But not for long; for more gobs kept coming and pitching in. And most gobs are remarkably clever with their fists and on their feet.

Several went down. Some bounced right up again. Others arose with hazy difficulty A few stayed down.

Jack Wells was one of those few. The last Jack could remember clearly was an explosion in his head. After that things dimmed. He was down, being kicked, tramped on. Things were blackening. The thumps of feet against his body seemed to come from farther and farther away, as did the shouted snarls and growls. He was battling, battling with all that was Mad Wells to hold consciousness. But consciousness kept slipping and slipping. And finally, another tremendous crash in his head obliterated everything. That was all.

WHAT the *Farallone* gobs did to those Siberian cops must have made many a bygone naval hero turn over and grin in his grave. In twenty minutes from the beginning there wasn't a cop in sight, save the few sitting or lying, and these were getting up and moving with as much speed as their bruised bones and muscles would allow. One of Frisky Malone's great feet sent the last of them galloping.

One man in the mob remained down.

Face down, half of him on the sidewalk and half in the gutter, lay Jack Wells. His long black hair was wet with the blood that oozed from a large gash on his head.

"Fer Hiven's sake," shouted Frisky, bending over his prone shipmate, "let's git this lad back aboard! Come now, lads, bearr a hand! Mind what I'm tellin' yuh's! Let's git 'im to the sick-bay!"

A droshky was hailed, and the unconscious lad started shipward.

Paymaster Dolby, who had been standing

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by watching the affray, saw something on the sidewalk, something that caused sudden surges within him. It was that envelop. He stooped and picked it up, looked at it, broke the seal, thrust his fingers within, his face changing from red to white and white to red.

"It's mine! Ours!" he ejaculated, holding up the package of greenbacks he had drawn from the envelop. "It's the money I lost—three thousand dollars. I had it when I left the pay-office. I was going to exchange it for rubles—for expense money. I lost it—it got away! How in thunder——"

No one disputed him. Certainly no gob present held the flicker of a doubt. And if any of the foreigners near by had essayed any questioning—well, there would have been another fight. For Pay had the buying of that crew's eats, as well as the handing out of their money—and the *Farallone* was a "heavy feeder." There wasn't a gob on the ship who wouldn't go through hot places for Pay.

Thus it broke up. The gobs scattered along the Main Drag.

BUT alas for the *Farallone* gobs, that liberty was a short one. Following close upon the mix-up the word went up and down the Main Drag—passed by several of the ship's petty-officers.

"All hands back aboard at once! We're gettin' up steam! Goin' to sea."

"To sea! Sharks and whales! We only just came in!" they protested.

"Well, we're just goin' out again," they were informed. "Never mind the questions! Get back!"

Bound for where? No one knew. But "All hands return" was the order.

And a grumbling, long-faced stream of gobs poured back over the big ship's gangway. Liberty clothes were squashed unfolded into sea-bags. Oaths and snarls and once-I-get-out-of-this-fool's-outfit threats flew broadcast. From stem to stern the cry went up:

"She's mad again! She's mad again!"

Soon the fires below were roaring. Steam-gage dials moved round. Sweat poured—he-man sweat. Black smoke belched from the four funnels, belched forth and rose in great woolpacks to blend and interfuse with Russia's ages of melancholy. Yankee officers were barking politely to British gobs on the wharf.

The captain of the British cruiser had been kind enough to send over several of his men to handle the *Farallone's* lines, and thus help Daddy Doone make a quick getaway.

Tugs? Daddy Doone was in a hurry! He backed 'er out into the middle of the bay, winking foxily at Commander Balde, the executive officer, as she missed the stern end of one of the Japanese battleships by feet. One minute later, the ship straightened out and moving full speed ahead, Daddy Doone winked again, as she all but scraped the paint from the side of the Italian gunboat.

Daddy Doone could handle his ship in a way that made it look easy.

At dusk the big American vessel had gone. Several Siberian policemen were not sorry. Great garlic and vodka! How they fought—those —— Yankee sailors! Their hard fists flew out like the paws of cats, and on their feet they danced like monkeys! They took the parts of, yes and scattered their money on beggars and cripples! Good riddance to the lunatics! And, too, it was good to know that one of them at least had been carried back—with a broken skull, it was to be hoped.

BARELY audible at first, but rising in steady crescendo, those noises came to Jack Wells in his darkness as the distant boom of breakers against a rocky shore. He strove to classify and localize that succession of booms and crashes, but the effort brought pain along with a nauseous sensation of falling. For miles and miles he fell, and still those sounds persisted, pealing up out of the vast black void, rising higher, boom upon boom, crash upon crash, coming nearer and nearer, till they were bursting upon him like rolling rumbles of thunder, or the roaring of guns, or—What was it, in the name of everything?

Boom, boom, boom. Crash, crash. Swish-sh-sh-sh.

Thunder? No. Guns? No again. Then what?

Crash, crash. Swish-sh-sh-sh.

Those crashes—that long sustained, sibilant, mushy *swish-sh-sh.* Water! Pounding, rushing, swirling water! That was it! More than that—water beating against the

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ship's side. Those boom-boom-booms—the pounding—that was it—the pounding impacts of the *Farallone's* great bow, when she drove into a heavy sea—when she was pitching heavily—going up-up-up and down-down-down. That was it.

Then apprehension smote him as he realized that he was falling faster and faster. Would he ever reach the bottom? Or was there no bottom to this black and profound space? Or was he not falling, but soaring—rising, or bolting straightaway—through space that was boundless, bottomless—infinite. It was hard to think with a head that reeled, and with those roars pounding on his ears. If he would only cease falling—or soaring. If he would only bump—the bottom—or something.

With that Jack did bump. He fell into as nice and soft a spot as a fellow could want to fall into—a bunk.

When he opened his eyes he was in the sick-bay. It was some time in the day. The ship was pitching moderately. The sea must be rough, from the slosh against the ports.

His head was tightly bandaged. He felt pain; seemed his every bone and muscle ached and throbbed. Never had he been so sore all over—so sick—dizzy. But most unbearable of all was that within him which was clamoring to know.

Mingled with the noise of the water against the side, he heard voices, and correctly surmised that Surgeon Jones and his four pharmacist's mates were holding sick call up forward there.

Several times he made effort to call out; but so great was the noise of the water, so low of lung-power he, and so tight the bandage over his ears, that he barely heard his own voice.

Then one, little "Pest" Nickols, a shipmate laid up in a bunk across from Jack's, saved the day.

"Hey, you guys," Pest shouted to the group up forward. "Oh doctor, Wells is blinkin' his eyes!"

The next moment Doctor Jones was bending over him, feeling his pulse, looking searchingly into his eyes. Crowding up behind the doctor, Jack saw the stretching necks and anxious faces of several shipmates.

"How do you feel, Wells?" the doctor asked at length.

Jack replied promptly, and with terseness.

"Like ——."

The doctor smiled and let go of the sick man's wrist. Turning to one of the pharmacist's mates, he began—

"Give him some——"

"Doctor," Jack broke in on him, "give me some daylight first of all. I want to know things, sir. Where are we? What happened?"

"All right, Wells," the doctor replied, after finishing his oral prescription to the P. M. "Daylight you shall have. You rate it. You've had three days of midnight. But I don't want you to talk much yet. However, I'll satisfy your curiosity.

"We're up off the coast of Siberia, about two hundred miles north of Vladivostok, on our way back to Vladie. We're towing a ship—a little tramp-steamer. We picked her up yesterday. She'd lost her rudder in a heavy blow they had up here—you missed out on all that. Anyhow we found her, disabled, unable to move. And we're Vladie-bound with her.

"We picked up her S. O. S. in Vladie Bay. We were the only ship that could receive her, I understand, owing to her having a weak sending-apparatus. I'm stuck now," he broke off laughing. "I'll have to let the radio officer give you the rest of it. I might manage to talk you blue in the face on X-ray stuff. But radio——"

He shook his head.

"Besides," he went on after a few moment's pause, "I want you to rest. I'll chase the radio officer down this afternoon. He'll tell you all about it."

THE afternoon brought Ensign Dodley, the radio officer. He was one of those fine young products of Annapolis—a big, hale, handsome young *he*, with dark eyes that roved and laughed and a ruddy complexion, and with enough good fellow in his make-up to cause him to be spoken of as a prince. He sat on the edge of Jack's bunk, looking down into his eyes, the expression on his boyish face a blend of curiosity and wistfulness. When at length he spoke his tone was not that of an officer to one of the rank-and-file, but of bunkie to bunkie, or pal to pal.

"Of course we're all glad to hear Wells is alive again," he began. "Sort of lifts a heavy cloud."

Jack thanked him.

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"But it sure is a great one—" Dodley's eyes were dancing playfully. "I mean your amplifier."

Despite that it gave him pain, Jack grinned.

"You traced out my connections, did you?" he said. "I didn't think any one could. I broke four or five wires that night Shorty caught me."

"You did far better than that," laughed the officer. "Trace 'em out! You made that impossible! On your diagram you had all your connections crisscrossed, backwards, upside down. The only man in the world who could read that diagram was Wells!"

At which Jack grinned intelligently.

"But I did *guess* them out," the ensign went on. "After Scott reported to me how he'd slipped in and caught you with the set all in pieces; how the instant you threw the switch the phones were fairly barking with static; and how a moment later you began breaking connections—after that—well, I wanted to know."

He bent over and placed one of his big strong hands on Jack's bony shoulder.

"I knew one thing, Wells: I knew you were no madman. When Scott told me the phones were fairly dancing on the desk with static, I knew you'd never built that device for the purpose of eliminating static."

"Sorry failure if I had," Jack answered, grinning again. "No, sir. I was building an amplifier. I got the idea a couple of years ago. I'd worked with several amplifiers. A few on the market work fairly well; but most of them are useless. None of them are any good in places where static is heavy, because you amplify the static along with the signals. But there are lots of places where an amplifier is a big help to receiving. And that's what's in my death-trap, as they call it—an amplifier."

"But what made you fool everybody into thinking you were loose? Why a static eliminator?"

"Why? Because it's my own idea, sir, and I want everything that's coming out of it. Most inventors are poor business men; which accounts for thousands of the tales of those that die in lunatic asylums. I knew that, sir, when my idea came two years ago. And I kept it in mind all the time I was working that idea out. It never gave me any pain to know they were calling me a lunatic. But it sure would hurt like ——, sir, if I were to wake up some day and find my two years' work pinched by some shark that never did a day's work in his rotten life. And when they got curious, I told them I was trying to take the static out of radio.

"I don't hope to make a million on it. All I want out of it is enough to set myself up in some quiet place, where I can work, unworried and undisturbed."

In the long silence that followed, Ensign Dodley looked earnestly into two gray eyes that were fixed on something far up and beyond the overhead bulkhead.

"I can't see how I can go wrong." Jack's voice was as far-away as his gaze.

Then a fiery gleam leaped into those eyes as they left the profound spaces above and came to rest on the clear dark ones of the officer on the edge of his bunk.

"It's a better amplifier than anything they've got on the market today!" he asserted with much heat. "I can't go wrong——"

"Wrong!" echoed Ensign Dodley, as he stood up and pointed astern. "We've got a ship on the end of a tow-line. The other day she was bobbing up and down in a storm up the coast a ways, pumping out S. O. S. with her tiny half-kilowatt set—and not a soul in the world was hearing a dot of it.

"I was trying to work out your hook-up—I'm keen on puzzles. I guessed at it for a while without result. Finally I put it on paper. Four broken wires; eight loose ends. I numbered 'em. Looks easy, eh?"

Jack shook his head.

"No; that'd take a lot of paper work. Good many possible ways of hooking those eight ends together. I knew that.

"Anyhow I struck it. Each time I finished connecting them in a certain way, I put on the phones and threw the switch. If that hook-up failed, I opened the switch and tried another. Twenty-six times I failed. Then I struck it.

"I threw the switch, and there she was, this little tramp, pumping out S. O. S. with her little half-kilowatt set. There wasn't a gob of static in the air. And she rolled in on me like a house afire!

"Go wrong! A half-kilowatt set—over four hundred miles—in the day time. That's *some* receiving. No, Wells; you can't go wrong on that amplifier."

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"Unless I'm easy enough to let some shark cheat me out of it," Jack replied. "That's why I kept it under my hat. That's how come Mad Wells."

NOT many afternoons later Jack Wells walked the promenade deck of the big Frisco-bound army transport. Yes, sir, here he was right up among the first-cabin passengers—army, navy and marine officers, their families; a few big engineering men; several dethroned Russians, for whom things had become too warm; and not a few just ordinary Americans, who had seen enough of Siberia—and he only a gob.

A gob with a stateroom suggested a high and capable hand. In this case the hand was that of Daddy Doone.

All was well, he soliloquized, as he watched the sun, now sinking over Siberia's long bleak shore-line. Shorty had apologized, and made good the apology by carrying Jack's death-trap over from the *Farallone*. And Frisky had expressed his appreciation of Jack's "wonderful wallop-shwingin' ability" by toting Jack's bag, hammock and ditty-box, these all lashed into one bundle.

"Homeward bound! Homeward bound!" That was all he could hear. From stem to stern it was being shouted and chanted and muttered and whispered. Even the gulls that still hung on astern in the hope of another scrap filled the cool spicy air with it.

Homeward bound. Everybody—from the great army general, who lolled in his spacious and elaborate stateroom, down to the lowliest navy mess-attendant, who bunked in the hold up forward—everybody was homeward bound. Yes, even these dethroned foreigners, he supposed were homeward bound, in a way; relatives would no doubt meet them in San Francisco. Jack Wells would have bet his death-trap he was the only one on the ship who was not homeward bound.

Home? He must have had one all right, before the San Francisco earthquake. All he knew was what they had told him at the orhpan home many years before: That a wandering waif had been picked up out of San Francisco's chaos; that he had been held for some days unclaimed at the police station, then transferred to the orphan home, where they named him Jack Wells.

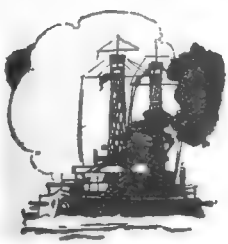
He had never been able to think of that orphan home as a home. It had not been able to hold him beyond his fourteenth year. Since then——

But those days were gone. No longer a rolling roustabout. In his ditty-box was a letter, elaborately written and elaborately signed by Daddy Doone. That letter would introduce him to an old schoolmate of Daddy Doone's. He sat in lofty deep velvet, this man. He was one of the lollers—a big manufacturer of things electrical. Jack would have only to present Daddy's letter to this man—and, presto, the death-trap would be exploited so quickly it would make his head swim.

Home? He would build a home. Yes, and build it high. He would live among people who don't saw their soup and slide-trombone their coffee; who eat with their forks; who don't burst a fellow's ear-drums when they talk.

He could go after mathematics now, hammer-and-tongs. Yes and take a whirl at some of that other stuff—psychology, logic——

The sun sank over Siberia's long gray coast-line. The long gray coast-line merged into the blurred horizon. The last of the flock of shore-bound gulls became a white speck—then nothing.



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The MYTH-KILLERS

A Four-Part Story—Part I

by HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "Long Rifles," "Red Autumn," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE NATCHEZ MAKE A PICTURE

THE pirogue drifted into an eddy and, knowing I was in the immediate vicinity of Fort Rosalie, I leaped out and drew my dugout up on the bank. It was near sundown and the shadows were beginning to creep out from the western bank. Although having had three years of experience with the mighty river it always fascinated me; especially when the shadows began to rendezvous, or when the white mists danced before the rising sun.

I never tired of watching its irresistible and sullen onrush to the Gulf. Such tremendous secrets the Mississippi could tell! What peoples had haunted its shores throughout the ages? Was the red man the first to attack the monsters drinking from its flood? I had traveled it much and always found it to be a mystery.

Across the last red lane cast by the low sun were drifting the strange playthings the giant had collected on its way from the vagrant Shawanoes, from the country of the Illinois, and from the far-off land of the Sioux. This was a whim of the river, and in this trait only was it feminine—this eternal hoarding and discarding of trifles.

In this phase it displayed the greed of a royal courtesan and the improvidence of a gutter drab. Below me it was throwing aside a great tree, torn from some centuries-old bank, and which it had tenaciously kept within its grip for many a league. In midcurrent, jealously guarded against grounding, floated the carcasses of a buffalo and deer, grotesquely swollen and evil smelling. Close inshore drifted an empty pirogue, bearing murderous tomahawk scars which whispered of tragedies.

These surface indications of high water and savage attacks were mechanically classified and filed away in my mind, while I repeatedly asked myself what would the river do for this new world, so little understood even by us veteran *coureurs de bois* in this Summer of 1720?

It was a sinister tyrant, a whimsical giant, what you would. It flowed through hobgoblin land. No tale was too strange and fantastic for belief if connected with the Mississippi. I prided myself on my hard-headed English sense, and yet I could not resist its lure. Long companionship permitted grotesque illusions sometimes to creep into my prosaic mind and make a dreamer of me for a moment. There was no beauty to attract me, such as I had observed along the more gracious Ohio. There was lacking that spell of utter desolation which I had found in pushing up the muddy current of the Missouri. It was a rapacious thing, a fickle thing; its potentials, its many promises of incredible achievements, haunted me.

It had labored at its task ever since the first mountains formed its enormous basin; it would be carving out destinies for all

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earthly time to come. It was ever tearing its way to the Gulf in a ruinous fashion, as if any price were cheap to pay; and yet its inexorable purpose to gain the sea never impressed me as hinging on haste, or that such a union was its prime motive. It boomed along through the freshet seasons as if mad to attain a climax; nevertheless, I always felt it was taking its time, quite content to wait a thousand years, or ten thousand years, before accomplishing a purpose.

Such puny triflers as La Salle and De Soto had been peremptorily dealt with; the assassin's bullet for one and the river's maw for the other. And these two were simply types of countless others, of high and low degree, even including my humble self and such savage yet dependable fellows as Damoan the Fox, who had parted from me at the mouth of the Ohio.

And what fortune did the river hold for Spain, for France, for England? Since the wreck of the Armada, Spain was out of the game except as it won temporary success by rather desultory playing. Solitude had made me something of a philosopher, just as my occupation tutored me in politics. If I filled my lonely watches with mooning over the mysteries of the inscrutable waterway, also did I observe much which pleased Governor Spotswood of Virginia, and other notable leaders along the Atlantic coast.

John Law's amazing circle of finance, with the mighty empire of France thoroughly gullible, was closely watched by us in America even if we could not foresee how swiftly the crash would follow the first symptom of weakness in his system. There are those who in calmer years have held that the fantastic notions concerning the Louisiana country grew up from the prodigious falsehoods nurtured by the Company of the Indies, better known as the Mississippi Company.

I never could accept this process of reason; in truth, I reversed it. I have always held that Beau Law could not have staged the greatest gambling saturnalia of the ages had not the way been smoothly paved for him by Europe's credulity in the marvelous and impossible. Only because it was the age of fairy-stories were half a million foreigners flocking madly to the dirty rue Quincampoix to trade in the shares of the Mississippi Company.

We in Virginia and the Carolinas were intimately informed of the doings of Law from the time he organized his first company. It was common knowledge how map-makers and "historians" were vying with each other in popularizing miracles in the new world. One could lift one's self by the bootstraps in Louisiana. The Mississippi was but another name for hyperbole. Its tributaries drained regions where strange white races dwelt along the shores of vast inland lakes, hemmed in by sands of purest gold.

There were the mines of Marameg! There was the fabulously rich and wonderously beautiful country of Acaanibas, where King Hageren took a new wife each day, and possessed more gold than ever was found in Peru. If the fountain of perpetual youth had not been found, at least there remained hills of sparkling jewels with which one could buy and renew youth in any land.

I was no skeptic concerning mines, and possible pearl-fisheries in the Gulf. But when immigrants poured in and expected to find unicorns and other dream-monsters in the land of the Paducahs (Comanches) I laughed. I knew the river as well as any *voyageur*. For three full years I had sailed it from the northern lakes to the Gulf. I had made friends with the tribes at the mouth of its tributaries, and was welcome among the Quapaw on the Arkansas, where Law had a grant of many acres, and to which he failed to send his promised fifteen hundred colonists.

I accepted mines as possibilities, for the wealth of the southern continent was a matter of history; but when they talked of dwarfs and giants and ethereally beautiful Indian maidens I must see them before believing. When Damoan the Fox heard such yarns—and he was most at home in the wigwam—he would smile with his tongue in his cheek.

The English feared that the impetuosity of the French in exploiting the Louisiana country, and their feverish efforts to populate it, would give the vast valley to Louis XV. But I could not forget that France's belief in the marvelous must be reflected in her colonists. And I could not believe that Louisiana would be held by those who believed in myths and fairies; no more than the English could have held the coast settlements if, instead of prosaically making homes, they had dwelt on the fantasied doings of King Arthur's knights.

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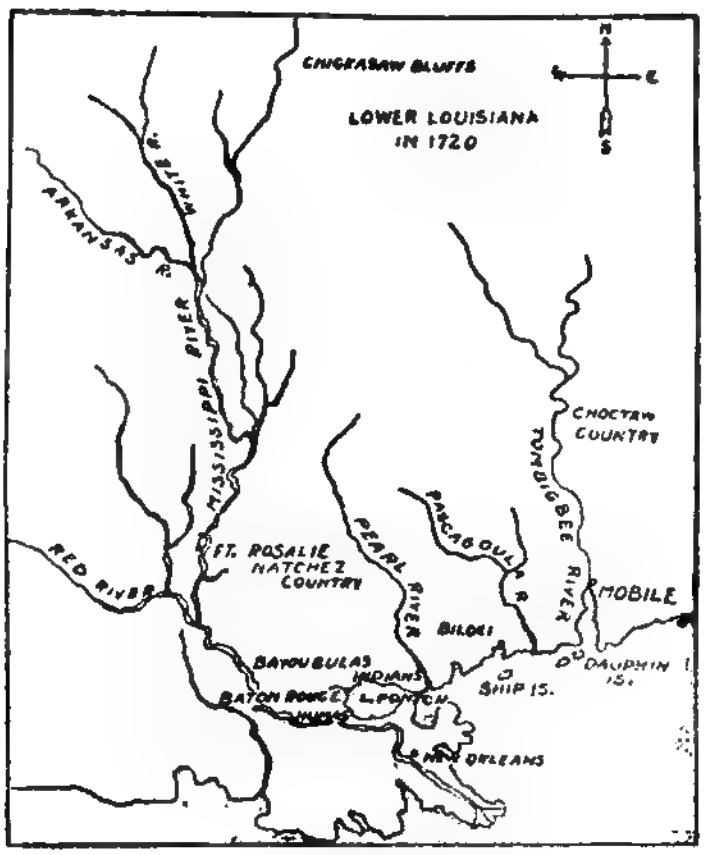
Trade was to shape the destiny of the Mississippi basin. Those who persisted in dwelling in elfdom must lose the race. Just now Law and his iridescent schemes of turning nothing into something stood at the peak of affairs; and his shadow filled the valley and crept across the Appalachians and threw sober-minded men into a fine sweat. Obviously, if he could keep his company's shares from rising to the exploding point until he had colonized the country, and had developed its natural resources, he would succeed despite his rôle of miracle-man.

Beau Law's job was to keep his stock from



exploding, and within three years he had seen it rise from five hundred to fifteen thousand livres a share! The Englishman's job was to bring home-makers into the country and establish permanent communities. Homes and crops first, then mines if there be any. So far as I could foresee the very nature of Law's advertising must defeat his plans to people the valley. From his residence in Place Louis le Grand he might order the sailing of many ships; but who would fill them? The absurd tales peddled by his agents could attract only the dissolute, the reckless, the purely adventurous, but never the heads of families.

The coming and going of these unstable classes would leave no French foothold on the land. In all my work of spying up and down the river I knew of but one menace to England's ambitions; the linking of Canada to the Gulf by a chain of forts, thereby making permanent settlements possible. This was the farsighted plan of Louis de Buade, Count of Frontenac, one of the greatest Frenchmen of his time. In the consummation of his original plans lay France's strength and England's peril.

To detect any adoption of this most sensible policy had engaged much of my time, and was responsible for my uneasy flitting up and down the river. The Kaskaskia settlements and the building of Fort Chartres might mean the scheme was being worked out in the Illinois country. It would amount to but little unless extended down to the Gulf. Hence my desire to learn if Fort Rosalie had taken on any political importance, or remained simply a storehouse for French trade.

With my smooth-bore flintlock over my shoulder I made my way up the bluff crowned with oaks. When Iberville, that great apostle of Louisiana's commercial future, first saw the gracious hills around the main village of the Natchez Indians he fell in love with the spot. It must have impressed him as being most refreshing after the monotony of marsh and cane down the river. And he built the trading-post and named it after Madame the Dutchess of Pontchartrain. It was the first permanent French settlement in the valley south of Kaskaskia. Ah! But those French were beforehand. If they could have held what they were first to take how differently history would read!

It was now my business to reconnoiter the fort, and observe how much strength the place had gained since I was there last. Also I must decide how much I would be risking in continuing down to New Orleans and Biloxi. I was safe from search, as the papers containing my Canadian data had been sent up the Ohio. Of first importance, also, was to learn the attitude of the Natchez toward the French.

White Apple, the main Natchez village, was located about three miles southwest of the fort on a small stream, and was less than three miles from the Mississippi. After reconnoitering the fort I planned to return to my pirogue and take the water-route to this village. On my last passage up the river the Natchez were very friendly with the French; but much can happen between voyages.

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The Chickasaws had been developing an ugly streak for months. Notwithstanding their clash with the French in 1716 the Natchez took to French friendship instinctively. This, perhaps, because the tribe's many ceremonial forms were so elegantly observed by the Frenchmen. Unlike the Natchez, the Choctaws and Chickasaws preferred New England rum to French brandy, while there was no questioning the superiority of English over French trade-goods.

My countrymen had better goods and sold them much cheaper, and our traders were continually running the risk of taking their wares to the three tribes mentioned. Bienville, most capable and shrewd governor general of Louisiana, maintained his supremacy by setting Choctaw against Chickasaw, while holding the Natchez neutral. Had he received the support he deserved from his Government there would have been but little smuggling of English goods, and the Canadian *coureur de bois* would not have sought the secrecy of the forest to barter his furs to the Carolina traders, rather than to take them to the Gulf settlements.

I worked along the bluff until within sight of the post and breathed in deep relief. The storehouse seemed closed, and I could discover no signs of any new cabins in the background. The place had grown none unless it be some few settlers had built cabins invisible from my position. A minute of study satisfied me, and I began retreating toward my pirogue, when a noise between me and the river sent me to ground and to cover.

It was a slight tapping noise and suggested a woodpecker. I crawled toward it, but again sought cover as careless steps sounded in the growth. The man passed quite near me. He was a tall fellow, at least an inch over six feet, with the mahogany complexion and the graceful, powerful physique of the Natchez. He carried no arms aside from a meat-knife fashioned from a sharp-edged reed. He was returning home from neither war nor the chase; and he was too far from the village to have been philandering.

After he had passed from hearing I took his trail and easily followed it back to the edge of the bluff. It ended in an opening which afforded a magnificent view of the river; and there I found what had caused the tapping. And it made my heart glad; for it threatened much trouble for the people of young Louis XV and his dissolute uncle, the Duke of Orleans, regent. When the French fell, the English went up—and contrawise.

It was a dressed skin, made fast to the bole of an ancient oak, with two reed arrows, painted red, stuck in the ground before it in the form of an X. On it was painted a hieroglyphic picture. In the upper right of the picture was the red and white feathered headdress worn by the *Grand Soleil*, or Great Sun, as the head-chief of the Natchez was called.

Next was depicted a naked Natchez warrior holding a war-club. Then came an arrow, pointing at a figure over the head of which was a crude representation of the *fleur-de-lis*. Below was a moon and the outline of a peach and a bunch of grapes, followed by many straight marks.

Being translated it announced that the Great Sun of the Natchez declared his intention of making war on the French during the Moon of Peaches. It was now the tenth of June, the Moon of Watermelons. The Moon of Peaches was July. Counting the marks I found there were twenty-eight of them, and I knew that within fifty days war would begin if nothing intervened in the mean time to cause the autocrat of the Natchez to change his mind.

HERE was a matter of great importance. Here was something to take to Bienville as a proof of my sincerity were the French inclined to suspect me of being English at heart as well as of name. Very possibly my superiors on the Atlantic coast would prefer I keep the news to myself and let the French make their own discoveries. But when one is widely isolated from his own people, and must depend upon himself entirely, he thinks less of political advantages and much of a whole neck.

Aside from this instinct of self-preservation was the likelihood that the Natchez would change their minds before it came time to smoke the final war calumet. For Tattooed Serpent—erroneously called Stung Serpent by the French—war-chief of the Natchez, and a brother of the Great Sun, had been a consistent friend of the French ever since the trouble in 1716, and his great influence would be against war. As his brother had great affection for him I did not believe the threat on the painted hide would be carried out.

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Also, word of the declaration was sure to reach Biloxi speedily. However, for my purpose the declaration was of much importance, provided I were the first to carry the news down the river. Until changed, the war plans of the Natchez were of evil import to the lower valley. The man who first carried the word would be doing a great service for France. I proposed to do that service, and thereby learn things of more importance before starting north again.

I knew the Natchez and admired them. They were entirely different from the Choctaws and Chickasaws. They were an agricultural people, skilled in weaving the inner bark of the mulberry for clothing, and greatly excelled the surrounding tribes in pottery. They built their dwellings and temples upon mounds, and in the latter kept fires burning continuously in connection with their worship of the sun.

Unlike all other Indian tribes I was acquainted with, their head-chief seemed to have absolute power. There was much in their customs and rituals, and their sun-worship, that suggested the natives of Mexico and the southern continent. I knew Tattooed Serpent and had been his guest more than once, and often had observed the red pole standing by his bed and decorated with forty-six circlets of reeds, painted red. Each link in the chain was for a foe killed in war.

Yes, surely did I have an excellent excuse for thrusting my head inside the French settlements once more, and give the lie to any stories accusing me of being an English spy. And one did need the best of defenses when confronting Sieur de Bienville of the implacable will.

Ordinarily the Natchez would have taken their declaration of war down the river and surreptitiously posted it within the limits of the people to be attacked, as their custom demanded. The tribe was observing their ancient usage, however, in posting their war-picture on the bluff, for the excellent reason that the French claimed Fort Rosalie and the immediate neighborhood to be French soil. The year before I went to the Mississippi the Natchez struck the ax against the Warriors' Post and defied the French. Now for four years they had been at peace largely because of the influence of the Serpent and the diplomacy of Bienville.

My message to the governor should tend to establish me in his good opinion, as he would promptly credit English traders with stirring up the trouble. Believing that, he must believe me to be a renegade Englishman with no love for my own people. It was a long cry from Beau Law and his ideas of finance to the fate of the Natchez, and yet it was but one of the striking demonstrations of cause and effect to be witnessed before the belief in pygmies and giants, beaches of gold and mountains of precious stones, was to disappear.

I stole back to my pirogue and pushed off and dropped down-stream, with no further thought of visiting the Indian village, and only anxious to be the first to carry the news to Bienville.

CHAPTER II

FRANCE SENDS MORE RUBBISH

AFTER leaving the hills and bluffs, I experienced that feeling which always came to me when descending the river alone; that is, that the river was sentient and was pursuing me. Foolish, no doubt, yet impelling enough to make me swing my head frequently in staring back over the desolate flood and its burden of drift. I never experienced any bizarre sensation in fighting my way up-stream. I sharply missed the companionship of Damoan the Fox, a great scamp yet prince of woodsmen. Once I would have sworn a piece of drift suddenly darted behind a tangled mass of forest trees, as if propelled by human agency.

Without incident I passed the red pole, which for years had marked the boundary line between the Bayogoulas and the Humas—a Choctaw tribe—and came to the Ascantia, as the Indians called it, or the Iberville River, as the French knew it. The bed of this stream was above the surface of the Mississippi, except during high water. I was pleased to find it possible to enter it, as it would save me a long trip to the mouth of the Mississippi, or the abandonment of my boat at New Orleans while I crossed the portage to Pontchartrain and found a canoe.

I was now sending my pirogue along the waterway which places New Orleans on an island at high water, and which Iberville used in making the coast when he discovered and named Lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain.

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My first night on the river I camped on a dry knoll and built my fire near a tree on which was cut the Cross. Iberville must have camped on that identical spot, as it was his custom to cut a cross wherever he landed. During my trip across Maurepas and for half the distance on Pontchartrain I might have been the last man in the world; for aside from wild-fowl and the water-life there was nothing to attract my attention.

Then my isolation was shattered by the sight of a canoe coming toward me from the direction of Bayou St. Jean. As it drew nearer I decided its sole occupant was a *voyageur* from the north. Like myself, he wore skins for clothing and had a gay cloth tied around his shaggy locks. He too, was much interested in me, for he rested his paddle and shading his eyes scrutinized me closely.

I also rested and waited for him to finish his study. Suddenly he drove his paddle over the side and came toward me swiftly. I slid the muzzle of my musket over the side—a brave weapon from the St. Etienne armory, as one could see from the three bands holding the barrel in place—and called on him to halt. Abrupt approaches in the Louisiana wilderness betokened hostility, or great friendship. And this shaggy fellow was unknown to me as yet.

"That is near enough," I called in French. "Who are you "

"*Pardieu!* How proud he is! The White Indian will not greet his friend!"

The merry insolence of his voice could not be disguised. With a thoroughly amiable grin I dropped the musket between my feet and held up empty hands. He shot his lighter craft alongside and would have kissed me had I not held both his hands.

"Joe Labrador!" I exclaimed. "I thought you to be taking a wife at Montreal. Who would have thought of seeing you on Pontchartrain!"

"And you, Monsieur Brampton, the White Indian! My heart was broken when I found Yvonne had married a miserable, spindling fellow, who does writing for the governor. I come here to bury my heart. I stop on the estate of Monsieur le Page du Pratz at the Bayou St. Jean. Little birds tell me France is to send over many beautiful women, like virgins. And to find you here, in *monsieur's* back door, as one might say!"

"I am making a short cut——"

"*Diable!* But you are a brave man!"

"Brave? How so? I know the river and the forest and the Indians."

"Ah, but Sieur de Bienville? I, your friend, wish by all the saints that you knew *him!*"

The good fellow's heavy beard bristled and his dark eyes became heavy with fear for me.

"*Tête de bois!* Speak out. The governor-general I know well. The last time I came up the river I dined with him at his *la Nouvelle* Orleans."

Gesticulating excitedly with his nervous hands he cried—

"My head may be of wood, but 'tis better than no head at all."

"Your heart is purest gold, old friend," I soothed. "Tell me all."

"After you went up the river the last time forty of his Excellency's soldiers deserted, running away to Carolina. And he vowed he would hang you if he ever caught you, for enticing them away."

This was disturbing news. I could trust Joe Labrador, old companion in many a venture, to speak naught but the truth. Then I became angry, as a man will who is wrongfully accused. There was much Bienville could have arraigned me for; I might even have seduced his soldiers from their allegiance had it appealed to me as being feasible. So I became incensed now I was charged with something I was innocent of—doubly resentful because I had not had the wit to think of it.

Labrador mistook my silence for hesitation, and earnestly said:

"You must turn back at once before any of Monsieur du Pratz's people see and recognize you. I will go with you as far as Fort Rosalie, perhaps farther. I will forget my new wife. I will go beyond Chartres. Bah! there will be women enough for all of us. Sieur de Bienville is in a temper. Now France and Spain have had a peace-smoke he is like a bear with a sore head. For years he has begged to have the seat of government changed to *la Nouvelle* Orleans. He has been denied. Pardieu! What will the imbeciles in France have? Bienville is to make the Lilies grow in the valley. Yes. He is to send the immigrants on their way as far as the

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Missouri and the Yazoo. To be sure. But behold! Nothing but jail-birds, worn-out rakes and women of the street have been sent over! And even these so fast he can not have time to send them to the plantations. Thank the good God some decent women will be coming along now! Bienville is a bad man to have against one. And you, my friend, are very tall."

The last referred to the general belief that Bienville was jealous of men of generous stature, his own height being somewhat below the medium. During Labrador's outburst I had had time to cool off. I remembered the card I had to play, and could not believe the governor would deal harshly with me. I was innocent of decoying his soldiers away. They had not needed my urging to make them deserters. And small wonder that any were left for garrison duty, now it had become necessary for the governor to quarter them among the Indians, where they dressed—rather, undressed—and painted themselves like savages, and learned ways of idleness, which unfitted them for routine work.

"Where is the governor?" I asked.

"At New Biloxi. If he has not been warned of your coming you have every chance to get away. His thoughts are filled with red axes because Monsiegneur L'as' company will not follow his advice and move its headquarters to *la Nouvelle* Orleans. It is your lucky star that sent you by this cut-off instead of down to *la Nouvelle* Orleans; for he has spoken ill of you there, and every cabin is ready to gobble you up."

"Does he think any other ill of me besides enticing the soldiers to desert?"

Labrador shrugged his shoulders eloquently, and exclaimed:

"Who knows what his Excellency thinks? The good God—yes. My friend; it is enough that he thinks ill of you."

"He is unjust. He wrongs me," I persisted.

"La, la! One does not demand justice of his Excellency. He steals away and hides until the storm is over."

"I will go to Biloxi and talk with him."

"*Sacré bleu!* Go to Biloxi? Find a big alligator and stick your head in his mouth."

"Nonsense. Sieur Bienville is a just man, as well as a great man. I'll see him."

"You'll find no peace calumet in Biloxi," he earnestly warned. "Go back up the river. Return to Canada. Spend the Summer on the Ohio, or among the Illinois Indians—where you will. But do not die a young man down here in these swamps and marshes and stinks of rotting vines and reeds."

"No man on earth can send me running to cover when I am innocent," I declared, feeling very virtuous because I was innocent of the crime charged.

He eyed me admiringly, yet pityingly.

"You know you are English," he softly reminded me.

"Runaway English," I gruffly corrected. "There are runaway English, just as there are runaway Frenchmen. I've lived on the river for three years. It suits me. I'll stay."

"*Ma foi!* Yes, you'll stay!" he groaned. "And you? You go back to Orleans?"

He hesitated, his soul struggling between friendship, fear and hopes of matrimony. One of the last two won for a time; and he muttered:

"I return to Bayou St. Jean. When the ship comes in some of the women are to be sent at once to *la Nouvelle* Orleans. I shall be there, waiting. I shall marry a good girl. If she turns out bad I can always go deep into the forest."

I could not blame him for avoiding my dangerous company when his presence could aid me none. He was one of the Labradors of Canada, and like the majority of the Canadian born or bred had small liking for the French born, just as the latter looked with contempt on the children of the new world. The Labradors were bold men in their natural environment, the northern forests. Among the Indians, or in opposing nature's fiercest moods I could not ask for a better, truer companion. But down here among the marshes and swamps, and under the eye of Bienville, he would walk softly.

He showed his native astuteness in avoiding the governor's displeasure by keeping clear of me for the time. I knew that when it came to a pinch he would cheerfully make any sacrifice to aid me; for there was a small matter between us, born of the dangers of the Illinois country, an affair of my aiding him to escape the stake. And he believed he was indebted to me.

He reasoned that just now he could help me none by accompanying me to Biloxi.

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More than likely such an association with the White Indian—as I was called because of my forest-running—would place him under suspicion. And lastly, were not new wives coming to *la Nouvelle* Orleans, and those on the spot would have first choice. He lacked the reckless qualities of Damoan the Fox, but would last longer on a trail of trouble.

"My friend," he softly called as his light canoe moved off a few rods toward the St. Jean shore, "if you find the path rough I shall know it. The river is all ears and a great gossip. Whatever happens at Biloxi will be quickly whispered in *la Nouvelle* Orleans. My ear is to the ground. I shall hear. If the worst comes the river-path to the north shall be opened, and we will follow it and find plenty of room to live our lives in the good God's country up there. You are runaway English. I will kiss my wife good-by and be runaway French. *Bon jour et bon voyage.*"

BIENVILLE had vision. He knew the importance of a river-port. He had fretted much because the Government had ignored his preference for New Orleans. I was at New Orleans when his fifty axmen were felling the forest and clearing out the swamp growth. It was the one spot on the river in close proximity to the Gulf that would answer for a permanent settlement. I think he would have won his point if not for a rise in the river inundating the little settlement; and Biloxi was again chosen. Like a shuttlecock the seat of government had shifted back and forth between Biloxi and Mobile.

My first impression of the New Orleans site was unfavorable. It was only ten feet above the river, not high enough to escape the worst floods. It sloped back to the marshes of Lake Pontchartrain and the Bayou St. Jean. Its position did have the advantage of allowing two routes to the Gulf—one down the river for large boats, the other, after a short carry, over the inside route I was taking. If any one could seal the Mississippi Valley for France it would be Bienville with his bull-dog determination and his common sense.

Even though working under the tremendous burden of trash for colonists and the company's frantic orders for the discovery of mines, or anything else which could be immediately realized upon as an asset, he believed he could win out if permitted to develop New Orleans and other river-ports. To control the destiny of the valley from the Gulf was impracticable. One might as well try to govern it from Pensacola as from Mobile or Biloxi. And I was determined to complete my journey and meet this cool-headed, sagacious executive with but one card to play against his belief that I was something more than a renegade Englishman.

For the rest of the trip across the lake I saw no one except a Choctaw hunter after birds. I greeted him in French and he agreeably responded; for the Choctaws ever loved and served the French as consistently as they had fought the Spaniards, the Creeks and Chickasaws. I was to live to see English traders win some of their towns to English interests, but the bulk of the tribe was to remain loyal to the French, and to make war on the seceding bands.

The French always had a way of handling the natives which my brusk countrymen could not imitate. I saw no one else until after I had cleared the lake and was opposite the mouth of the River of Pearls, when two Frenchmen in a clumsy sailing packet came along and went into the wind, and gaped at me in amazement.

"The White Indian!" one of them exclaimed, while the sail flapped impatiently against the stub of a mast.

"I was beginning to think you had lost your tongues," I replied. "I am bound for Biloxi. Can you give me a tow?"

They exchanged quick glances, and the elder of the two bowed most graciously and insisted:

"Better than that, *monsieur*. The pirogue will annoy you. Make it fast for a tow, then come aboard and take your pleasure decently."

The by-play of their eyes had not escaped me; nor did I doubt they had been ordered to watch for my coming. It mattered nothing, however, so long as I wished to make Biloxi. The boat would be more comfortable, and if they were secretly delighted to serve their master I, too, could rejoice at being relieved from the exertion of paddling the heavy pirogue the full distance.

So we set off, contented and gay, the two of them singing snatches of *chansons* which invariably reflected some amorous

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sentiment. Between these bits of sentiment they asked me polite questions about the upper river. It was plain that word had been passed along the river to watch for and report my presence; and I even suspected I would have been seized by my smiling boatmen had I shown a desire to retreat. Joe Labrador had said the very huts at New Orleans were ready to "gobble" me up. The nearer I drew to Biloxi the more sharp set would I find this disposition to be.

"What is the latest news, my friends?" I finally managed to ask as their chattering queries slowed down.

"A wife-ship comes to Biloxi. We hurry home," said the younger man with a snicker.

"Silence, Basile," sternly rebuked the other. "*Monsieur*, the White Indian, we are Jules and Basile Mattor, father and son. What the boy says is true; a wife-ship comes. It is bad for man to live alone." And he fetched a deep sigh.

"The Company of the Indies has listened to his Excellency's advice and will send no more wantons across the ocean," babbled the young man.

"Silence, child!" commanded the father. "Yes, *monsieur*, the White——"

"Monsieur Mattor, I am William Brampton," I broke in.

"Monsieur Brampton, I am more glad to meet you than you can know. As the boy says, this wife-ship will be filled with honest women. Women one can love and cherish, and take pride to show to one's friends. Good cooks, good——"

"But what of the news?" I interrupted.

Mattor *père* drew a long face and mournfully replied:

"The last trade-law goes bad with us. As for that all our trade-laws are bad. To get——"

"We shall draw lots to see who has first pick!" cried Mattor *fils*. "Those who wait at *la Nouvelle* Orleans will get but the plain and ugly ones."

"*Nom de Dieu!* Have done, thou chatter-ape! Draw lots? A father draw lots for a new wife against his son? Thou unnatural one! Men of years and wisdom will have first choice. As for the plain and ugly, there will be none such on this wife-ship. A thousand pardons, *monsieur*, but I was telling you about the last trade-law when this love-sick child showed his poor manners. To get supplies we must go to Mobile, Pensacola or Massacre Island (the old name for Dauphine Island, so called from the mounds of human bones found there). For delivery at *la Nouvelle* Orleans we must pay five per cent extra, twice that if delivered at Natchez, and thirteen per cent—ah, *mŏn Dieu!* How that extra premium does climb up—at the Yazoo."

"Such terms make goods dear," I sympathized.

"They'll be taxing us on wives next," growled Basile.

"Chut! Thou foolish one! Goods dear? Name of an eagle! *Monsieur* has heard nothing yet. Fifty per cent is added for the settlements in the Illinois country and at the Missouri. One could weep!"

I suppressed a smile to hear how foolishly the Company of the Indies was playing into English hands. It would be hard enough for them to hold their trade without penalizing their customers. The directors of the company could never comprehend that to succeed it must encourage the colonists to work for themselves. "Work for us," was their motto. Mattor ran on:

"But that is not the worst, Monsieur Brampton. If we would trade we must send our products to *la Nouvelle* Orleans, Biloxi, Ship Island or Mobile. And first-grade tobacco can bring only twenty-five livres the hundred, rice twenty livres the hundred, the best wheat flour fifteen livres, and a livre for a deerskin—think of it!"

"A pint of brandy costs fifty livres!" cried Basile.

"And only black men can work in the heat and raise our crops!" added Jules.

"But with a young wife perhaps one can do better," sighed Basile.

"It is hard to be a planter here," I agreed. "Now in Carolina—but I can not return there."

"We understand *monsieur's* very sensible emotion. *Monsieur* can not return there," said Jules.

His expression and bearing were simplicity itself; his words contained a veiled threat.

"Bah! Who cares?" I cried. "Not I. I have lived in the woods so long I am known as the White Indian. I will never be cooped up in a settlement again, even if free to come and go as I pleased."

"To be sure. Such truth! To come and go as one pleases," muttered Basile.

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"All I wish now is to find Sieur de Bienville," I added.

"Then you will go to Ship Island, for his Excellency went there this morning to await the coming of the wife-ship," said Jules. "*Monsieur* does not think to take a new wife?"

The last was anxiously put, as if the speaker feared there might not be enough women to go round if every one was permitted to take them.

"I have troubles enough without taking a wife," I said. "I think I will sleep."

I rolled my robes in a pillow and stretched out in the bow and fell asleep almost at once. When I awoke it was to see the stars overhead. One of the Mattors slept, the other huddled over the tiller and kept his course through his intimate knowledge of the coast. Only a keen desire to land me in Biloxi could have induced them to take advantage of the light, yet persistent, breeze once the night shut down.

I slept again, and on my second awakening found we were behind Ship Island and making for the anchorage on the north side, where the masts of a ship were silhouetted against the morning sky. As I surveyed the Bay of Biloxi, the islands, and the main, I could not blame Bienville for his impatience with the Government for insisting on a Gulf port. Shoaling of the port on Dauphine had driven the seat of government from Mobile to Biloxi, where more than a score of years before Iberville had discovered the seven-foot passage around Deer Island. Doubtless the white beaches, backed up by terraces of noble oak and pricked through by many towering pines, had pleased his eye. But those who dwelt in Biloxi learned that the reflection from the sand was evil to endure, and that boats left unused were soon destroyed by the worms.

However, it was the unloading of the cargo-ships that supplied the last word in waste and inefficiency. Vessels from France must stop at Ship Island, nearly fifteen miles from the settlement. The cargoes were transferred to packet-boats which were met by small boats when two or three miles from shore. Nor was this the end of landing the goods, for the small boats in turn took the sand a musket-shot from shore, and their loads were brought in by men, or by carts on high wheels. All this fuss and bother was enough to drive a practical mind to frenzy. When immigrants are substituted for barrels and bales one can easily imagine the confusion and dismay of the newcomers.

Once I witnessed the landing of eight hundred immigrants on Dauphine—three shiploads—and I shall never forget those scenes. The island itself was a sand-bar, decorated with a few withered evergreens, with the main consisting of forlorn swamps and the islands so much marsh-land. A closer examination did not promote cheerfulness among those newcomers, as it revealed on both coast and islands huge heaps of pre-Columbian shell-heaps and quantities of human bones. It would have been bad enough had those first immigrants been selected for the hard work ahead, but when one remembers how they were the off-scourings of French jails, deserters, prostitutes, the weak and sickly, it would be difficult to paint an adequate picture of their misery and suffering.

I had seen them huddled together without shelter, without food, homesick, starving, and dying, while Bienville worked most desperately to distribute them up and down the river.

At that time I stood in high feather with the governor, having accompanied him and his axmen the previous Winter to New Orleans. But I had never been on Ship's Island when immigrants were arriving. As it was part of my business to learn the kind of men and women, as well as the number, the company was sending over I was glad the governor was at the island, as otherwise I might not have been allowed to go there.

A priest at Kaskaskia had told me on the down-trip that the reckless shipping of convicts and fallen women had been ordered stopped, and that a more desirable class of home-makers were coming to the valley. The more desirable they were the more aroused the Atlantic provinces would become.

"I have some hard Spanish money for you, Monsieur Mattor," I remarked as I sat upright.

"God hear me! But hard money is a fairy hard to catch, now that Monseigneur L'as has covered the world with his paper money!" exclaimed the father.

Well, he did not exaggerate overmuch! Our mid-Winter advices from London put the paper currency inflation at two and

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a half thousand million livres, while our bankers estimated the total specie of France to be not more than half that incredible sum. The very packet seemed to sniff the prospect at silver and leaped more buoyantly through the shallow waters.

At Ship Island, where the boats anchored—the Mattors called it Isle Françoise—there was twenty feet of water. The island itself had but one feature to recommend it—the several ponds of fresh water where the immigrants could drink and from which ships could renew their supply. As we drew nearer we saw the ship was discharging merchandise, while men and women were roaming about in all directions, receiving their first impressions of the new world.

"His Excellency will be near the other end, making ready to bring the immigrants to the main," spoke up Jules Mattor, shading his eyes as he spoke and staring at a group of women.

"Draw lots! That's the fairest way," mumbled Basile, his thick lips writhing as he watched the women.

"His Excellency will listen to all requests and decide them," cried Mattor *père*. "*Sacré bleu!* A son would gamble against his father for a woman!"

"Land me near the ship. I'll hunt the governor afoot," I said.

We ran into a cove near the ship and I tossed Jules some silver pieces, which he kissed enthusiastically and then hid them in his clothes.

"It's the *Maire*," cried Basile, his eyes lighting with boyish interest. "I saw her last season when she came in to Dauphine with the warship *Africaine*. They were bringing blacks from the Guinea coast. Faugh! A sweet-smelling ship for the ladies!"

"And they *are* ladies!" cried Jules. "I see one in black who walks like a queen. Wives for some of us. First come, first served!"

And with that he leaped ahead of me and raced up the beach in his haste to present Basile with a stepmother.

It was not until clear of the *Maire*, which the immigrants seemed to shun, that I sensed the confusion of the scene and observed the amazement and despair of the newcomers. A few sat around in groups, staring stupidly at their surroundings. Several women were laughing and crying hysterically. Bienville's all too few soldiers were bustling about trying to herd the poor creatures in one place, so they might be questioned and apportioned to the different districts before being hurried to the main. Orders were bawled vociferously.

A sergeant, tanned as dark as a Guinea black, was unusually active in pulling and pushing the immigrants about. As his French was liberally streaked with Indian words and phrases it was hard for the strangers to understand him. In disgust I watched this fellow, his dirty paws making too free with the women, and then had my ire aroused by beholding him seize a woman in black by the arm—the one Mattor said walked like a queen—and give her a spin that sent her reeling across the sand to fall at my feet.

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!*" I found myself shouting as I sprang between the brute and the poor thing. "Are these people here for punishment, or to build a new world?"

"Ten million ——s! Who are you to interfere with Sergeant Suarez, twenty years in the marines, when he is doing his duty?"

"Never mind who I am. Leave the woman alone."

He crouched for a spring, his eyes glaring like a tree-cat's and I was ready for him, when to my surprize the rage died out of his face. His dark countenance began twisting up like old parchment. "God is good!" he whispered, exultingly. "That brown beard! That big nose! Broil me and boil me if it isn't the White Indian! He! Ho!" And he threw out his empty hands in an exaggerated gesture of welcome.

"The White Indian, yes. What of it, you nimble-jack?"

"No, no," he softly cried. "I shall not be drawn into a quarrel with *monsieur*. He is game for my betters. Ah! But this rare news. I'll get an extra ration of brandy for this, slice me with little reed knives if I don't! I leave you to console the wench, *monsieur*, while I go to tell his Excellency."

And off the rascal ran.

I turned to help the woman to her feet, but she was already erect, a slim figure in black, the somber tone of her attire being accented by the mass of yellow hair and the clear ivory pallor of her features. And as I gazed I found myself thinking that the hardships of the voyage had left her all eyes. Several women, attracted by the scene, laughed raucously; and a glance told me

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Bienville's insistence that decent women only be sent had not been heeded. I would have turned away if not for the unspoken appeal in the oval face of the sergeant's victim.

"I have not thanked you, *monsieur*," she whispered.

"Nor shall you. I did nothing. But you are ill, *mademoiselle*."

"A hunter bargaining for a wife!" shrilly screamed a wanton. "They swim out to meet us. Don't waste time on that sniveling thing, my big man."

"A well-set man! Where is this new Paris, *la Nouvelle* Orleans, my pretty fellow?" cried another, placing a hand on my arm and seeking to lead me away.

Without removing my gaze from the woman in black I shook off the hand. Now she was shrinking from her mates, and well might she, as with foul abuse they upbraided her for trying to "steal the first proper man." There was death in her face as the torrent of filth was loosed, and I would have retreated to save her something of embarrassment had not the Mattors now come up to be instantly pounced upon by the harpies.

"Will you walk to where the boats are, so you may go to the main?" I asked.

"God!" she shivered, staring frantically about. "To the main? To the wilderness! To the savages! Anything to escape *that!*"

And her gaze followed the group of forlorn creatures now pawing and mauling the two Mattors.

"My name is Brampton. I'm English. Something of an outlaw from Virginia. You came to help make Louisiana great?"

"I am Claire Dahlsgaarde. I've come to die," she simply replied.

"You fear that they misrepresented conditions to you?"

She gave me a quick sidelong glance, as sharp and penetrating as the point of a needle, and with more control of her voice informed me—

"I was picked up in a raid."

My first thought was that she must be the daughter of some poor farmer. For the company's agents in rounding up the friendless to ship overseas had no scruples in taking the daughters of the poor, be they ever so virtuous. But a glance at the slim, white hands, so aristocratic and so unused to labor, sent a chill to my heart. She was poor, but no daughter of poor but honest people.

"You were bagged with those mad women by mistake. Your friends already know the truth and are sending after you, or are seeking you. You will be returned on the next boat, perhaps on the *Maire* once you have explained matters to his Excellency."

"No, no, no," she fiercely whispered. "I shall never go back. I have no friends. There is no one to say a good word for me—to help me. I shall die in this horrible land and no one will ever know."

"But, *mademoiselle*, the world is not so large as that," I protested. "Even if you wanted to hide, you could not. I see you are a woman of refinement. So you must have a family behind you, also friends."

She made no response to this, but held her hands to her head, and by the agitation of her slim shoulders I knew she was weeping in a silent, heartbroken fashion.

She had been picked up in a raid. That was easily understood. But a young woman with slim, soft hands, who had not worked, who had no friends to appeal to, no kin to make an outcry, no one. And yet there was infinite appeal in the small face and her silent grief. Her utter helplessness increased the inevitable suspicion. Anyway, it was not for me to condemn her.

I broke the silence by offering—

"I will walk with you to the shore and see you start in one of the first boats."

Her head jerked up as I spoke, because of some aloofness in my tone, I fear. I had not meant to be cruel, for she was heart-sick and body-sick, a very young woman as helpless as a child, and marooned in a land which must be to her a perpetual revelation of horrors.

"It will be good to go in the boat," she managed to say. "But perhaps not the first boat—it depends."

"It will largely depend on his Excellency's orders," I corrected.

"But they—the women—said there would be much waiting. Too few boats—I can tell better when I see them loading."

Here was fine picking and choosing for one of her world.

"Your name is not French," I remarked for the sake of saying something as we walked along the shore.

"Danish—I am Danish," she softly replied.

"And from Paris, or one of the villages?"

"From Paris—last. I have no home—nothing."

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We were now on the outskirts of a clamorous mob, where men and women fought to be first to leave the island. I saw Bienville calmly directing his soldiers. Sergeant Suarez was at his side, carrying out the low-voiced commands. The sergeant saw me and said something to his Excellency, but the latter continued with his task without giving me a glance. One packet was filled and starting for the main. Another had room for two or three, and Bienville ran his cool gaze over the pushing, jostling crowd. His eyes rested on me for a moment without a sign of recognition; then his arm shot out and a finger pointed in my direction, and his voice rose above the confusion to command:

"That woman back there. No; the one in black. Come, *mademoiselle.*"

She paused for a moment and anxiously examined those aboard the boat, and then glided forward without a word or a glance for me. There was a commotion behind me and a short spider of a man, who walked like a sailor, and whose withered face denoted a long life—evilly spent if there is anything in physiognomy—snarled aloud, and with unexpected strength hurled two men and a woman from his path in his efforts to follow her. She heard the animal-like cry and turned her head, and there was an awful horror in her gaze as she beheld the man; and her eyes sought mine and pleaded protection.

Instantly I knew she did not want this fellow to follow her. Intuition told me her fear of him was the reason she was unwilling to make for the boats until she had seen him depart, or knew he was left behind. Instinctively my long leg shot out and the toe of my moccasin caught his instep, and he was down on his face in the sand. By the time he scrambled to his feet she was in the boat and Bienville also was aboard. The governor was calling back to the sergeant:

"The others must wait till the next trip. Get them rations from the ship."

The boat drew away from the shore and the hideous little man was at my throat. I leaped back and he attacked for the second time. He had very long arms and one hand held a dirk. I guarded with the barrel of my musket and flung him back on the sand. This time he rose more slowly, his small, deep-set eyes glowing with murder as he took time to inspect me.

"That's much wiser," I told him. "Your voyage made you bloodthirsty."

"Drown me in bilge, but you're English!" he exclaimed, some of the malevolence leaving his puckered face. Then venomously: "Blast your eyes! You stopped me from making the main."

He stood with his long arms hanging limply at his sides, and I noticed the little finger on each hand was missing. He had the appearance of great age, and yet he had been as active as a monkey when he sought my throat.

"His Excellency would have turned you back. The boat was filled. They haven't taken off all the women yet," I said.

"Women!" he chuckled, turning to three women who had been attracted by the scene.

The three lost their brazen boldness and shrank back from his leering gaze.

"Women!" he repeated. "I've seen 'em afloat, and I've seen 'em ashore. And the dear creatures alwys took kindly to old Bill Slasher."

"Old Six Fingers is your name," one cried, making the sign of the cross.

"Aye, ye hussy. Old Six Fingers ever since a mate gambled and won 'em while we was camping on the Spanish Keys. Then we played for heads, and I won his'n." And he gloated wolfishly over some fiendish recollection.

"You come over on the *Maire?*" I inquired.

"Aye, mate. Come because it was my choice. A man who sailed with Cap'n Davis and helped sack Pensacola in sixty-five ain't to be made to take any v'yages he don't fancy.

One of the women mimicked him, and he wheeled on the trio and cowered them by snarling—

"Ye hussies! Old Six Fingers has seen slimmer weasands then yours slit for too loud talking."

"You poisonous little beast," I told him.

He took it as a compliment, for he disclosed some scattered fangs and proudly replied:

"Aye, aye, my pretty gen'l'man. Oh, you're quality. I know it when I see it. I didn't sail with Cap'n Davis for nothing. And there was other bold hearts that was bigger men then Davis."

"Pirates," I jeered.

"Freebooters," he corrected. "We victualed in New York town many a time when every one knew who we was, and not a hand

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was raised against us. From New York to Havanna we ranged in the good old days, with never a coast town that wasn't glad to feed us if we'd only git back to blue water. As for this old Gulf! What times! What times!"

"The times have changed. You can't expect to carry off young women from Louisiana."

"Carry off women, you lubber? I'm past wanting women. They'd all flock to old Six Fingers if I didn't keep 'em away from me. I want to git ashore and hunt for some of them mines all England and France is talking about."

"Mines, mines!" yelled a clear voice; and a young man in tattered finery came rushing from the direction of one of the ponds, his yellow curls blowing in the breeze, his pale, dissolute face redeemed by a whimsical smile.

"The mad Mississippian!" screamed one of the wenches, throwing herself in his path and clawing at his ragged cloak which he wore jauntily although the sun poured down terrific heat.

The fellow brushed her aside and stared at me, recognizing me as a stranger. He came to a halt a rod away and drew his sword and kept the women back by swinging it in a circle. Then arranging his cloak and tenderly caressing the broken plume in his cap he lustily began proclaiming:

"Behold a Mississippian. Who wants some Mississippi? Ten thousand shares at sixteen thousand livres a share! Who buys Mississippi? You, fair sir, with the chestnut hair and beard? Ten thousand shares at sixteen thousand livres! Buy a league of the land where the dew in flowers forms into magnificent diamonds overnight! Come, come! Who wants any Mississippi? The land discovered by Jessamy L'as, where silver is so plentiful it is only used in paving roads, where lumps of gold are strewn so thickly that no one cares to dig beneath the surface!"

Six Fingers crowded by me, his eyes wolfish with greed as he listened to this fantastic harangue, just as he must have listened to it many times on the voyage across. The eccentric one was saying:

"What! You dogs dare refuse Mississippi at sixteen thousand livres, when it's known that the very water of the river, if allowed to settle, leaves a rich residue of gold in the goblet? Well, then; who takes twenty thousand at fifteen thousand livres'? ——'s mercy, you scum of the Quincampoix! Don't you comprehend that this Louisiana is the land of perpetual youth, where even the regent can retain his freshness, and where the natives are as young and vigorous at the end of six hundred years as the regent wishes he were today? Don't you know it's a new Eden without serpents, without toil, a land carpeted with rare flowers, where all animals are gentle? Now, who takes some Mississippi?"

Shrill laughter from the women, sour grins from the men greeted this performance. The effect on the old pirate was pronounced. He appeared to have been cast into a trance by the nimble mounting of riches, his eyes glittering and never leaving the speaker's wild countenance. As the speech ended Six Fingers shook his head to shake off the spell and turned to lower at the main. Now the tattered fellow was strutting toward me, doffing his worn cap and bowing low. As I acknowledged his salutation he courteously informed me:

"I am François Narbonne. These offscourings say I am mad. Perhaps it is so. I was poisoned in rue Quincampoix. I sold my heritage, a hundred thousand livres, and bought an estate in this land of gold. I paid thirty thousand livres a square league for land I never saw. Now I pay you my respects, as I take it you must be some overlord; or do you hold only socage tenure?"

More laughter rewarded him, and the women would have drawn closer to him if he had not waved them back. I began to sense tragedy in the pale face and reckless speech. He was not mad, I decided, but close to it. I put him down as a young roisterer back in Paris, who had become fascinated by the ridiculous tales. He had invested his entire patrimony in the land he had never seen. The island, the view of the main, the nature of his fellow voyagers, had awakened him to the truth. The stock-jobber's patter was his fashion of showing self-derision, perhaps was his only safeguard against insanity. I concluded I liked him. I briefly stated my name and my reasons for being on the Mississippi.

He threw back his head and laughed, laughed until the tears ran down his thin face. At last he gasped:

"A runaway Englishman forced to live here! And a Frenchman, who gives all he

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hath for the same blessed privilege! I must go without food for a day and say twelve *paters* and as many *aves* at the shrine of the Virgin. No, no. Not all that. I've been without food for three days. I owe nothing more than candles to the altar. I'll turn heretic. I'll turn Indian. Eh, Monsieur Brampton, would you kindly convenience me with a display of the latest steps of the war-dance?"

"——! But he's an odd fish!" mumbled Six Fingers. "He was dull enough coming over with his moping and groaning until we was two days from the coast. Then he began his talk about gold till one's mouth would water. Ah, now he begins. He talks most nobly when he speaks of gold and gems."

Narbonne, who was addressing nonsense to the circle, suddenly gave his attention to me and explained:

"I was thirsty and wandered to one of the lakes of rare wine, which bless this island, and so was not here when the boats set sail. I was so busy gathering diamonds formed from dew-drops that I lost sight of the precious jewels among us here."

And he swept the ground with his cap in honor of the women.

"I missed one jewel in particular; nor do I see her now. She was dressed in black, most unholy of colors for one entering this land of enchantment. Did she go to the mainland, or is she wandering about the island?"

"In the second boat," I coldly informed him.

The effect of the question on Six Fingers was amazing. He became transformed into a demon of hate, his squat body seeming to dilate as he crouched and glared at Narbonne.

"—— your lugs!" he cried. "So that is your game, eh? You're after her."

"What! The old six-toed rat dares address the Mississippian without uncovering? I must have one of those withered ears." And out came the cut-and-thrust sword and Narbonne was lunging playfully and dexterously at the ancient. With a scream of rage Six Fingers leaped backward and yanked out his dirk, and catching it by the tip hurled it at his tormentor. Only by dropping to the ground did Narbonne escape it.

Before the matter could proceed to more serious results Sergeant Suarez was between the two men, and hoarsely bawling:

"His Excellency rules that blood will have blood. Hanging for a killing. The galleys for the man who attempts to kill. You two are so full of life you shall come with me and help bury two dead men and a woman. The rest of you stay here. And as for you, Englishman, his Excellency's orders are that you be here when he returns."

"I came purposely to meet him," I said. "Till we meet again, Monsieur Narbonne."

"*Monsieur* is very polite. I repeat his words and look ahead to meeting him on the golden, silver mainland. *Pardi!* A gravedigger! He! He! Come along, little six-toed rat, we may find gold."

CHAPTER III

BAD NEWS AND SAD NEWS

WHILE waiting for Bienville to return I obtained a side-light on the monetary condition of the colony by watching two idle soldiers gambling on the sand. Thus far no mines had been discovered, although ingots of gold and silver were on display in Paris and advertised as having come from Louisiana. Two years before Nicholas de Fer, under directions from the company, had prepared a map of the Mississippi country which flamed the fever for speculation. The company also made changes in the old map made by John Senex, the Englishman, so as to picture the country a wonderful El Dorado, while Herman Moll, prominent English cartographer, marked across his map of the country west of the Mississippi—

"This country is full of mines."

It is true that my own countrymen in petitioning the Lords of Trade to establish military posts on the Bahamas and Port Royal Island to offset the evils of France's activity in colonizing the valley, urged that the cost of these posts could be met by gold mined in the Appalachians—"if only explorations are made to discover such." But unlike the French my people never deliberately fooled themselves. That the company would resort to almost any deception to lure colonists to Louisiana was shown when silver was carried from Mexico to the upper waters of the Mississippi and later "discovered" there as proof of the rich mines waiting to be uncovered.

With the Company of the Indies forever singing the wonders of Louisiana's mineral

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wealth, such commonplaces as plantations and crops were despised. It resulted that the immigrants sent over were incapable of, or unwilling to do, manual labor except in gold-hunting. When the Government demonetized gold and silver the specie, of course, vanished. The only remedy the company could think of was to ship over more useless immigrants. Even the importation of slaves failed to bring the results hoped for; although Bienville in desperation once petitioned for permission to exchange Indians for negroes in the French West Indies at the rate of three red men for two blacks.

But to return to my gambling soldiers. The fellows were playing for the heavy copper coins sent out by France, and at last one of them rose a winner, his hat being filled to the brim.

"Ah, thou unlucky one!" jeered the loser.

Whereat, having no way of carrying the heavy weight and small opportunity of spending it, the winner emptied his hat into the bay. When soldiers have no hesitancy in throwing their gambling gains into the sea it is not to be wondered at that they should desert.

While I waited the women watched me closely. One of them, less voluble than the others, strolled in my direction. I greeted her civilly, and after a few commonplace remarks and some eager questions from her I commented on her trip over and gradually narrowed the talk down to the girl in black.

Until then the woman had spoken decently enough to please any honest man. But when I spoke of the girl with the Danish name she gave a shrill cackle, and with hands on her hips cried:

"Ho! Dahlsgaarde, indeed! *Madame la Marquise*, we called her."

And she broke off from direct narrative to curse the poor stranger with terrible fluency. Having lost the edge of her villainous temper I proceeded to elicit what she knew about *mademoiselle*, and it was little enough. The immigrants, nearly all having been taken in raids, were aboard the *Maire* when the girl appeared in their midst. None saw her come, but all believed she had been kept as a prize by some of the ship's officers until it was time for the boat to sail. When she proceeded to keep aloof from them as much as the confinement of the boat would permit my informant accused her of preening herself on her conquest of the captain, or some of his men; and the next moment had swallowed her words as the girl threatened her throat with a dirk.

"The snake's spawn! But after the knife was taken away from her we gave her a pretty dressing-down," boasted the woman. "If not for the madman—the Mississippian—we'd 'a' stripped the cat. Few clothes she'd worn till she had landed here and could cover her nakedness as the wild savages do. *Monsieur* has a plantation near here?"

I shook my head, a picture of the girl facing those furies filling my mind.

"Well, up the river then. *Tête de foul* What does a few leagues matter in Johnny L'as' land? *Monsieur* must have a woman's love to gladden his lonely home."

I nodded gravely, and said:

"Too true. But up the river we have only corn to eat. Then there are the alligators—huge scaly monsters such as live in the Nile River in Egypt—so fond of women. Believe me, *mademoiselle*, one can not keep a woman very long. A month, once in a great while two months, then the woman goes to bring water and does not return. The empty jug is found. But if *mademoiselle* can place love above such trifles——"

With a squawk of terror she fled from me to put the fear of God into her frowsy companions, and I was bothered no more by their attentions.

At last came Bienville, and once more he kept me waiting until he had loaded the two packets; only this time he did not leave with them. I saw Narbonne and Six Fingers return from burying the dead and clamber aboard the second boat. Their gruesome task seemed to have made them excellent friends; for they laughed and talked in an uproarious fashion. As the boats were pushed off Narbonne stood in the bow and loudly announced himself as the original Mississippian and commanded the shallow waters of the bay to be still. Then catching sight of me seated on the shore, he gallantly waved his cap and bellowed an invitation for me to look him up once I reached the main and to pass my judgment on his cellar.

His Excellency now approached me, his steady gaze never leaving my face. He abruptly began:

"Monsieur Brampton, your coming gives me a disagreeable duty to perform. I could sentence you to be hung. I have had twelve deserters hung, and a spy is worse."

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"That depends on the point of view, your Excellency," I replied, rising and facing him. "You would never consider one of your spies to be as deplorable a creature as one of your deserters. May I assume from your words that you do not intend to hang me?"

"It will be the galleys," he coldly answered. "I should prefer to send you and other malefactors to work in the silver-mines in the West. But that can not be until I've completed negotiations with the Spaniards."

"Soldiers from Santa Fé have already come to the Missouri," I informed him. "So there is a trail that might be safer than the Gulf route."

"So!" he exclaimed, and I knew I had his interest.

Then he returned to my case and said:

"Monsieur Brampton, you know me. It must always be that an eye calls for an eye. Blood demands blood. Treachery calls for exacting punishment. I will be just; which means the price must be paid. Whether it's one of my soldiers, a poor savage, or a runaway English, the price must be paid."

"Your Excellency, I was told on Pontchartrain that you were grieved at something I was supposed to have done. I was warned that you would deal with me severely if I fell into your hands. I was told that every hut in *la Nouvelle* Orleans was waiting to 'gobble' me up. I asked where I could find you. The answer was, 'Biloxi.' After leaving Pontchartrain I was again informed that I must suffer if you laid hands on me. I asked where I could find you, and the answer was 'Ship Island.' Behold, I am here. I came without setting foot on the shore of Biloxi. Suppose you tell me what I have done to merit your displeasure. I have waited long here to be told."

"No, no, *monsieur!* Your assurance shall not blind me," he sternly replied. "I have no time to play with words. You know without being told how you have betrayed me."

I bowed and turned away, saying:

"Then I must await my sentence. France's system of *lettres-de-cachet* has been transplanted to Louisiana, it would seem."

"I will waste the words. I will indulge you to that extent, *monsieur*. You are charged with inciting my soldiers to desert to Carolina."

I wheeled about and indignantly returned:

"Prove it! Or find one man to swear it on the Cross, and you're welcome to put me in a coffin and saw me in two. Your Excellency, the accusation is as false as ——."

He shook his head and morosely insisted:

"You would have a hard time proving your innocence. You are English. For three years you have been up and down the river. I know it has been said that you dare not go back to Carolina or Virginia. How do we know that is true? The last time you were here forty of my men deserted immediately after you went up the river."

"So have they deserted before I ever saw the river. So they will continue to desert as long as they are allowed to run loose with the savages and forget the lessons of discipline. They have deserted to Pensacola as well as to the English colonies. They are protected by the priests in Pensacola even now. I repeat, on my oath, that I never encouraged a single desertion."

As if he had made up his mind to hear me out he wearily continued:

"As for your being warned against coming here your presence merely shows your hardihood. But I am not to be tricked by appearances of boldness. Perhaps instead of hardihood it was your sense of duty that drove you to Biloxi, let the result be what it may. It is a quality I must admire although I sit as judge."

"Duty has driven me here, your Excellency," I cried. "And it is to be true to myself rather than because of your deserters that I will now complete my errand."

As I spoke I dropped on my knees in the sand and drew my knife.

"Can you read this?"

And with the knife-point I carefully began a picture in the sand. He stared down at my work, his broad forehead developing creases.

"Yes, I can read that," he slowly murmured. "It is a Natchez declaration of war against me. But I do not believe it."

"——!" I cried, springing to my feet and thrusting the knife back in the sheath. "You not only will send me to the galleys, but you will insult me first!"

"I can hold deceit to be excusable when you are fighting against the galleys," he answered. "I have not intended to insult you, simply to speak what is in my heart.

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Monsieur Brampton, you know the Indians of the valley. You must know that a declaration of war, posted within the limits of any French settlement would never be left for you to bring to me. And I have heard the news from no one else."

"You forget that Fort Rosalie is French territory," I bitterly reminded him. "The picture was posted there on the bluff, where all passing up and down the river might glimpse it, if they had sharp eyes, and could land and read it."

"Enough of this. I trust the English as I would that lying Recollet priest Hennepin, who did so much mischief by his cursedly false description of this country."

There was nothing for me to say; and I stood and stared out over the Gulf. It was galling, this being accused of an offense I never had committed, this being refused credit for a friendly service I had actually done.

The governor continued in a cold, brittle voice—

"Pennsylvania has sent out scouts for three years on the Ohio and the Mississippi to learn what the French are doing."

"Yet Governor Spotswood, only this last Spring, reported to the Lords of Trade that the French 'have a settlement at Habbamalas.' I was told this in Canada by a friendly Carolinian. It shows that Spotswood's scouts have been ten years in learning of the French occupation of Alabama. It would seem that the English scouts are a small danger."

He wrinkled his brows in perplexity. Of course he had long appreciated how ignorant the English were concerning the French influence and development on the lower Mississippi and within what England held to be Carolina's charter limits. If I were what he charged, then I must be of but small value to the English for not having reported the Alabama settlement in 1717, when I first visited the lower river. As a matter of fact I had never dreamed that my countrymen were in ignorance of conditions which had existed ever since 1710.

After a brief silence he asked—

"You say the Spaniards have visited the Missouri by an overland trail from Santa Fé?"

"They joined the Padoucahs near the Kansa River, intending to raid Fort Chartres. The entire invading force was killed by the Osage Indians."

"But you did not say this before, that they were killed, that they came to attack Chartres!" he cried, now betrayed into a bit of excitement.

"I considered the thing most important to you to be the fact that there is an overland trail to Santa Fé, practical for troops. I save unimportant, but interesting, details for friends. There is no danger to Fort Chartres."

"We will go back in your boat," he muttered, leading the way to where the two Mattors were impatiently waiting for me. With them were two women. "How do I know the Natchez have declared war?"

The question satisfied me he was beginning to weaken, to doubt my guilt.

"Impose your cursed sentence and have done with it," I exploded. "But do not insult me further unless you are ready to give me satisfaction."

As I grew hot he grew cold and eyed me curiously.

"The governor of Louisiana can hardly fight with a felon. He will not fight with a friend," he quietly remarked. "If the Natchez have struck the Warrior's Post—and I will soon learn the truth—I shall suspend sentence on you until I can probe deeper into the desertions. Here, you, Jules Mattor! We go back at once. We have no room for women. They must go in the packets."

"But please, Monsieur your Excellency," pleaded old Jules, "these will be our wives."

"Not while you have Indian wives on Lake Borgne," growled the governor. "I will not have the Choctaws about my ears because their adopted brothers are playing fast and loose with their women. You two young women will return to your companions. Sergeant Suarez will see you are brought across the bay as soon as possible. Not a word, Mattor, I am in a bad mood. Up with that sail and set me across with all haste."

With ludicrous zeal the amorous old villain and his love-sick son worked the boat from the island and hoisted the rag of a sail. Bienville took a position in the bow, kneeling on my robes, his eyes fixed on the distant shore-line. I remained in the stern, knowing he would tell me when he wished my company.

Mattor *père* sailed the boat. Mattor *fils* rested on the tiller with his gaze turned toward the island where his frowsy goddess

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was painting the air with expletives. In the haze ahead were the hot sands and poisonous mists of Biloxi. In the middle distance were the Indian cabins on Deer island. The voyage was uneventful until we drew near the Deer Island channel and sighted a small pirogue rounding the eastern end. Bienville rose to his feet and displayed keen interest.

The pirogue was making to intercept the two packets loaded with immigrants. With his short, stocky figure seemingly a part of the boat Bienville snatched up one of my robes and waved it back and forth until the two men in the pirogue observed the signal. A moment of hesitation, and then they shifted their course and paddled briskly toward us.

When near us they came about and headed for the shore, resting on their paddles until we were almost abreast of them. Then they ran in close. They were thin, wiry, dark-complexioned fellows of the pronounced French *voyageur* type, and both were strangers to me.

"Ho, Jean Dumouy, what brings you here?" demanded Bienville.

"A speaking-bark from Monsieur Le Page du Pratz, of Bayou St. Jean, your Excellency," replied the fellow holding to the side of our boat, and using the Indian term for the written message.

He tossed a cylinder of bark into the bow and waited while Bienville opened it and extracted a small piece of paper. The governor read the communication with compressed lips; then asked—

"You have just arrived?"

"With all haste. Yes, your Excellency. We were making for the fort when we saw the boats and turned back, thinking to find——"

"Enough! Go to the fort and get food and drink. I will have a message for you to take back."

As the pirogue dropped away Bienville reread the message with frowning brows. Du Pratz, who lived in great ease on his estate at Bayou St. Jean—thus proving the climate and soil off the Mississippi could contribute all that man needed for comfort and health—had spent much time among the Natchez. Knowing the message was from him I was not surprized when Bienville came aft and informed me:

"You heard the boatman. Monsieur du Pratz writes to inform me the Natchez have declared war for the Month of Peaches. Some of his men brought the news down the river. They must have been close on your heels."

I recalled my impression of the object in the river moving behind the mass of drift. As I remained silent Bienville stiffly added:

"I make my apologies for seeming to doubt your word. But it is hard for me to trust an Englishman."

"You owe me no apologies. I owed it to myself to tell you with all haste, seeing that I make free of the lower Mississippi where you rule. Perhaps my motive was a selfish one; perhaps I feared the Natchez in going to war might mistake me for a Frenchman and stick an ax in my head."

"We will have a talk later," he muttered, his powerful mind already forecasting the future and seeking ways and means to mollify or block the Natchez. "I do not say I shall lift the peace calumet to you; but just now I feel more tolerant. Du Pratz's men should have arrived ahead of you. My men at Fort Rosalie must have been asleep not to have discovered the picture. When Cadillac five years ago refused to stop and smoke the peace calumet he laid a powder-train through the Natchez villages which I have had to watch ever since. And now the English traders have sneaked among them and fired that train."

"I must keep away from the English settlements, and yet they have something on their end of the wampum. At least do them justice to remember that since you built Fort Toulouse (known by the English as the Fort at the Alabamas) on the Coosa River in 1714 you have won thirty-five hundred warriors from their custom of trading with Carolina, and have influenced two thousand more so that they are about to flock to you. Today the English can only consider the Cherokees as being friendly. And all this in the face of the better and cheaper goods English traders offer the Indians."

"You may be runaway English, but you'll never run away from your blood, nor forget your people," he observed.

"God forbid! Being on Spotswood's blacklist is no reason why I should try to change my race."

"I use Indians. I use the scum of France. I can use renegade Englishmen if they do not try to play me false," he replied as he returned to the bow.

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Like the shares of the Mississippi Company my stock was going up. I knew my promptness in bringing the Natchez news had proved to be the strongest kind of medicine for me. And in a like manner have I often escaped a dangerous climax by stumbling upon some situation which I could twist to my own use and benefit. I was entirely composed by the time we landed on the east shore of the bay near Fort Maurepas.

Here in the old days came the Pascagoulas, or "Bread People," as the Choctaws called them, the Pensacolas, the Capinans, the Biloxi, the Chickasaws, and the Choctaws, to smoke the peace calmut with Iberville beneath the noble pines and oaks. Now there were some fifty soldiers loitering about the fort and under the pines trying to escape the heat. But even in the thick growth there was no relief. I made a mental note of the number of soldiers, took notice of the score of Choctaws scattered about the beach and clearing. I knew the bulk of the soldiers were living in different Indian villages, a great saving to the French commissary department, and yet a most dangerous bit of economy.

IBERVILLE led the way to a grove of pines and threw himself on the needles and motioned me to take my ease. He seemed impervious to the humid heat, but my face was dotted with sweat, and I longed to be back along the waters of the northern lakes, where the air was wine, where the rivers flowed cold and clean and knew nothing of the muddy habits of the lower Mississippi.

Bienville began:

"Monsieur Brampton, I have decided that I believe you when you say you had nothing to do with the desertion of my soldiers. There would be no reflection on your personal honor if I were forced to believe to the contrary. Nor have I any proof that you are an English spy. Now, *monsieur*, you have lived much along the river. Tell me what you consider to be France's greatest help and her greatest hinderance in developing the Mississippi valley."

Promptly and truthfully I answered:

"You are her greatest help, your Excellency. France's belief in myths and fairy-tales is her greatest hindrance."

"As a race we sometimes go to extremes," he thoughtfully agreed. "But that is not entirely a French fault. One of your English cartographers has made a map and marked on it, just west of the Appalachians, 'where the Tionontatecaga live in caves to escape the heat.' What heat?"

"The map-maker sometimes listens to wild tales of travelers and puts nonsense on his maps. The people along the Atlantic do not believe such stories."

"But your governors believe in mines among your mountains."

"That is not believing in myths and fairy-stories. There may be mines there. Mines are often found in mountains. But we do not colonize for mines. Englishmen clear the forests, make homes, plant crops. They press forward slowly, making sure of the ground they spread over. When the first colonists came to Virginia there were many adventurers among them. Like the Spanish and French in Florida and Louisiana they wanted quick wealth. Some went mad in their hunt for pearls after finding them in common use among the Indians. Then came men and women who built cabins and planted crops. They spend no time hunting pearls."

With a sigh he said:

"True. The good God knows I have always urged that colonists be sent over who would work the soil and raise families. My brother Iberville prophesied that the English would control the whole continent within one hundred years if we French did not take root up and down the valley. And you may have seen today what kind of colonists they send me! One ship-load of honest women did they send me, seventeen years ago when the seat of government was at Mobile. But the ship touched at Havana and brought the yellow-fever. Thirty soldiers, some of the women and, worst of all, the great Tonti died of it. It would seem that even virtue is not a paying commodity for us. What are your plans?"

Our wandering talk, ending with the pointed question satisfied me he had been laying an ambush for me. I yawned sleepily and said:

"I have none. By and by back to Canada. Perhaps a trip into the West among the buffalo-Indians of the plains."

"You dare not go back to the English colonies?"

I laughed grimly.

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"Virginia or Carolina would give many pounds to get me there."

Which was true in a fashion, for my budget of news was easily worth a good price now that English were awakening to the fact that the French were thick among the Alabamas.

Bienville rose and brushed the needles from his coat and said:

"You are English, *monsieur*. I have made my decision. The English have their spies up and down the river. Very good. I, too, have spies on the coast. One of them should be showing up any time now—if he has not been killed."

"And your decision? It concerns me?"

"To this extent. You must remain here, not leaving without my permission, until my spy reports."

"Meaning he will have something to say about me."

"He will bring your complete history. You are what you claim to be, or an enemy to France. I must know the truth."

My infrequent visits to the settlements, and the complete ignorance of many friends as to the cause of my prolonged absence on the river, left but a small chance for a spy to learn anything to my hurt. I was not alarmed, and said:

"His report will not flatter me if he talks with those in authority. They will paint me a fine rascal."

"I care nothing about your personal affairs, but my man's first business is to check up what you have told about yourself. I am very frank with you."

"I thank your Excellency. I only hope your man is painstaking and honest."

"He is what he is, but he will bring an honest talk to me. He is very wise. You must stay here until he returns."

"I am under arrest?"

"No, no. Simply my guest until I can give you a clean bill. Damoan will be most careful to get the facts right."

There was a mist before my eyes that was not from the steaming water. There was a buzzing in my ears that was not of the insect life; and there was a chill in my heart that even the Louisiana sun could not dispel. Yet force of habit permitted me to wear a mask of indifference, but it was a moment before I dared trust my voice. Then I said—

"Ah, the Fox?"

"So called. More rightly he could be called the Wolf, for he is more savage than cunning, more tenacious than subtle; and yet he is one of the most cunning and tenacious men I have."

He was watching me closely, but now I had a firm grip on myself, and said:

"I am glad Damoan is the man to look me up. He will make no mistakes. He will not hold back for fear of discovery and then come here and report lies to you."

"I rejoice you accept it so amiably. It encourages me. You are free to wander about."

With a laugh I accepted the situation and humorously remarked:

"If your Excellency had not placed me on bounds I would have been content to idle away a month here. Now I am itching to go somewhere else."

"That would be unwise—most unhealthy, *monsieur*. The climate is bad for those who exert themselves. If a man should lose himself I simply call, and the natives, from the Illinois to the mouth of the Mississippi, hear me and look for that man."

"With a possible exception of the Natchez," I amended.

"They also will heed my call," he sternly assured me. "I wish to be courteous to you, Monsieur Brampton. I appreciate your bringing the war-news to me. But France comes first, then Louisiana—we poor mortals last. If you attempt to leave Biloxi without my consent you will have Choctaw and Chickasaw—yes, and the Natchez heading you off. The Bayogoulas and Humas will join the hunt. If by a miracle you win by them then you will have the Shawanoes to avoid. Above them come all the Illinois tribes to block your escape."

"—— fire! I'm not planning to run from, or fight with, all the Indian nations in America. I stay willingly, only I hope Damoan will report soon. It is not my habit to build many fires in the same place, your Excellency. I am impatient when forced to remain in one spot overlong."

"Then we understand each other, and I shall be pleased to have you dine with me in the cool of the evening. I must leave you now and arrange for the immigrants to start on their journeys, as another ship is due to arrive at any time."

"You quarter them all here?" I asked as we walked toward the fort.

"The last two loads will stay here tonight. The first two are now on their way to

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la Nouvelle Orleans. These others will go to the Yazoo and the Natchez country."

I was thinking of the girl in black, and asked:

"What of Mademoiselle Dahlsgaarde? Does she return to France on the *Maire*, or must she wait until you verify her story?"

He halted and stared at me blankly.

"Her story? Return her to France? ——'s mercy, but we've already returned two thousand out of the seven thousand sent over by the company! It would require a most excellent story to get *mademoiselle* back to France."

"Yet decency and justice demand her return if she was illegally seized by the police in their raid," I persisted.

He smiled slightly, and coolly advised:

"Seek some deep shade, *monsieur*. The sun has made *you* believe in fairy-tales. The young woman made no claim on my indulgence. She said nothing to me about being taken in a raid. To the contrary she expressed gladness at being here, and only asked to be sent up the river. It is too much to expect to find a virtuous woman among those frail ones, but she is young and has much room to mend her morals over here; so I shall see her married to one of Monsieur Du Pratz's men and sent to a cabin near the Natches."

I was astounded. The girl had represented herself to me as the victim of an indiscriminate raid. And she had told the governor she was eager to penetrate deeper into what must be to her a most unlovely land. I thought of her soft hands. I thought of the monotonous corn-rations, which the Canadian French would eat but which the lower Mississippi French refused, except as a famine diet. I was astounded, I say, and yet why should I expect one of her caste to tell the truth? Nevertheless, there was something infinitely pathetic in picturing one so young and so unused to the wilderness being held a prisoner in the forest-cabin of a Dumouy. Her frailty was the fault of her environment. But a lonely Mississippi cabin was a terrible price for her to pay unless the men were similarly punished.

Owing to the disturbing revelations his Excellency had made about Damoan the Fox I could not give the girl much of my thoughts. She was simply a silhouette of sadness gliding into the forest to disappear forever. The exigence of my own affairs demanded my most careful attention. So as the governor strode away to the fort I wandered toward the shore to concentrate on my predicament. Damoan was deep in my confidence. His reckless, lawless nature seemed to make him an ideal companion to confide in.

It was imperative that my Canadian data should be delivered, and his trip up the Ohio afforded me an excellent and safe opportunity. And I had placed in his hands conclusive evidence of my guilt, and the moment he returned it would not be the galleys, but the noose. I searched the hem of the forest anxiously, fearing to see his lithe figure making into the clearing, his audacious face and glittering eyes announcing my death-warrant.

Had it been any other than the Fox I might have retained some hope. But Damoan would be most cunning. I could see him presenting my budget of news and thereby winning Spotswood's confidence. I could see him accepted as my trusted friend, eager to sell France for English gold. He would have my history complete once he finished with my countrymen.

I halted some rods from the shore and sat down. Narbonne was proclaiming himself to be the greatest of all Mississippians, and demanding to know where lay his vast estate. Six Fingers was with him, evidently finding huge joy in the fellow's rigamarole. I had jumped from the tranquil life of a *voyageur* into virtual imprisonment. I had met an ancient pirate and a madman, and a frail slip of a wanton whose oval ivory face haunted me. And over my head hung the shadow of a noose.

"*Monsieur*," murmured a voice behind me.

I turned, but there was no one except a lout of a soldier standing with his back to me, the butt of his snaphaunce flintlock resting on the ground, his gaze turned toward the forest-wall. Before I could question him he was softly repeating:

"Do not look at me, *monsieur*. Something for you under the butt of my musket. I swore on the Cross I would give it to you unseen by any one. Wait till I am gone before you pick it up."

I pretended to watch the small group about Narbonne. I heard the soldier moving away and gave him half a minute before leaning back on one elbow and placing myself within reach of a folded bit of

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paper stamped into the sand by the gun. As I secured it I saw it was torn from some small volume, perhaps a prayer-book. Satisfied no spying eyes were on me I opened it. It was written in English, and read:

Monsieur the Englishman.

Monsieur—I bribed a soldier to give this to you. He promised on the Cross. I must escape up the river and to the English settlements. If there is one generous heart in this horrible land to help me I know the good God will reward. When you get this I shall be on the way to New Orleans. His Excellency says I am to mate with a creature of the forest. I either go to the English settlements, or I die—C. D.

CHAPTER IV

ONE REASON FOR LEAVING BILOXI

I TORE the message into tiny pieces and buried them deep under the sand, and endeavored to analyze the woman's reasons for so dramatically announcing she must make the English settlements, or die. Why not Canada? I could understand how one of her sex, and utterly unused to the wilderness could be depressed to the point of madness by the desolate appearance of the country. But being of Paris I would have expected her to make for Canada, and from there take a boat home. She had made no request to be sent back to France, however, although she had told me she was the victim of a police-raid.

She spoke French like a native, claimed to be Danish by birth, and wrote excellent English. She was entirely different from the other women on the *Maire*, yet even those abandoned ones had kinsfolk and friends. *Mademoiselle* seemed to stand entirely isolated from the rest of the world. I should have felt much better about her could I have reconciled her soft hands with a theory of honest poverty.

However, it was not for me to set up as a moralist; her loneliness and suffering made her human. I knew I should help her if it was within my power. Not that I owed it to her, perhaps, so much as I did to a little brown-haired sister back on the Potomac.

A voice disturbed my meditations by ironically saying:

"*Monsieur* is buried beneath admiration for this golden bay. I am told that if one skim off the top six inches of water it changes to solid gold over night."

It was the tattered Narbonne. Back of him was Six Fingers, his parchment face leering malevolently. Farther in the background were several of the women. Without waiting for me to speak Narbonne ran on, evidently fascinated with his new subject:

"Acres and acres of solid gold, if one but skim it carefully! *Mon Dieu!* My six-toed old rat! Why be a pirate and cut throats when all one needs to secure gold is the patience of a night? And a skimmer! Ah, but that one night! Dew turns to diamonds overnight. Everything desirable happens—overnight. Jessamy L'as would have done better had he secured from the Regent all charter rights to the hours of darkness."

He paused for want of breath, and I lazily remarked—

"You two have composed your differences?" With a nod toward the pirate.

"La! we are brothers!" simpered Narbonne. "He goes with me to my estate. He is to be my gold-steward. You know, we are to find much gold and many precious stones."

Six Fingers came nearer and in English said:

"*Monsieur* and I start at once for New Orleans. Will you ship with us that far? I know the coast to the east. I know all the Spanish ports. But clew me to the anchor and dump me overboard if I know this —— river with its many mouths!"

That Narbonne understood my language was shown by his swiftly cutting in:

"We would take it as a great condescension in *monsieur*. Personally I will give you an option on some Mississippi at—hush, *monsieur!* But the terms must never be known—say fourteen thousand livres a share for ten thousand shares. We plan to catch all the wild cattle on my estate and spin their coats into a rare cloth. He who wears a cloak of this wonderful fabric can never grow old and can never be deceived. Think of it, Monsieur Brampton! To never be deceived! It would make one into a god!"

"Let's talk stuff one can understand," growled Six Fingers.

"There is only one subject to be talked in this marvelous land," cried Narbonne. "One would be crazy except to talk of gold in a land which made Antoine Crozat, one of France's richest merchants, a bankrupt inside of four years! Ignorant one, do you

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not realize that the excess of paper money over bullion is a nation's true credit? That France has the most paper money in the world, and therefore must have the greatest credit?"

"Sweet friend, have done with thy cursed chatter," groaned Six Fingers.

Then to me—

"Do you ship with us?"

A trio of the women pressed closer and one of them yelled:

"There are three of us helpless ones, *monsieur*. Three men will be needed to protect us?"

"*Mademoiselle*, his Excellency, the governor, rules that the women must remain here in quarters until tomorrow," I informed her.

She fell back to her mates, cursing me roundly, and to Narbonne I said:

"You two are free to go and come as you will. I can not go with you. I am sorry. If you will ask for one Jean Dumouy, Monsieur du Pratz's boatman, you can bargain with him to take you to Bayou St. Jean, and from there you can easily make the settlement."

"Monsieur Brampton is very polite," sighed Narbonne. "I had hoped for your gracious company. Come, old rat, we must find this boatman."

They started toward the fort, with the women making after them eager to beg a passage to New Orleans, which I believe they thought to be a miniature Paris. Narbonne waved them aside and they fastened upon Six Fingers, and while the old pirate was busy in fighting them off the Frenchman returned swiftly to my side and asked:

"*Mademoiselle* in black? She has gone?"

"To *la Nouvelle* Orleans," I informed him. "What do you know of her?"

"Only that I pity her. Only that she is alone in the world and very sad. Only that she is in great fear of my brother, the corsair. He keeps with me, thinking I am interested in her. I keep with him that he may not find her first and add to her fright. What a game! He wants to cut my throat, and is anxious to wait on me. I hope to see him die, and I will defend him from harm until I learn why the little sad one is afraid of him. I regret. But if *monsieur* can not go, then he can not."

This last was for Six Fingers' benefit as he had now got rid of the women and ran back with his ears pricked to learn what we were discussing.

"Impossible, *monsieur*; but I wish you well in your endeavors," I said.

And with a sweep of his cap the eccentric fellow took his departure and went to find Dumouy.

Narbonne might be mad, but there was no doubting the kindly qualities of his heart. The more I dwelt on the girl's message and my enforced stay at the fort the more I believed she should receive some word from me. I slowly made for the fort, pausing at the entrance to reconnoiter the square. It was now quite dark. On the left and next to the gate was the governor's quarters, and through an open window came the sound of his measured voice. A candle was lighted, and I saw Narbonne standing by the window.

Passing on to the magazine and guardhouse on the right and at the back of the enclosure I halted before a small office adjoining the magazine, in which burned a candle. The room was empty, and I entered, and found what I was looking for—writing material. Paper and ink were on the small table; also a thin packet of orders on the magazine, each headed with its familiar *Dépense Sauvage. Le Garde magazin delivera*, and the like. The orders afforded me information as to the degree of the Indians' dependance on the French trade, and revealed, among other items, that the natives were even buying deerskin of the French to be made into shoes, and what was almost as astonishing, were buying tobacco.

On the walls hung some of Law's maps of the country. These with their fictitious legends of mineral wealth caused me to smile. It was such as these that had induced Narbonne to invest his fortune in the new world. If I smiled Bienville must have groaned; for although he was a firm believer in Law's ability to develop the country within a few years—whereas it would require a generation—his Excellency knew the valley contained no areas strewn with lumps of gold and ledges of silver.

Those few soldiers who were not on duty were gambling and gossiping in their barracks. The lighted candle evidenced the return of the governor, or his superintendent; and I made haste to finish my business. Fishing some paper from beneath the packet of orders I hurriedly wrote my message to the young woman. For a variety

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of reasons I could not explain my predicament, and had to content myself with saying:

Mademoiselle Claire Dahlsgaarde: There is much danger, and yet there is no insurmountable obstacle for a young woman desiring to travel through this country. At present I am detained here. I hope to leave very soon, when my best advice will be at your command. I may arrive at New Orleans during the night. I may send word by a friend, whose passport shall be the words "The White Indian," and he will bring you to me. It will be necessary for me to start north immediately. I respectfully direct your attention to the Indian woman's dress, which is adapted to woods and river-travel. I remain your respectful servant—Wm. Brampton.

As I was hurriedly re-reading it I became conscious of being watched. There is something in the impact of the human gaze that would ever arouse me from a deep sleep. All men are similarly susceptible, and those inured to the necessity of watchfulness in lonely places usually develop the quality to a high degree. Anyway, as I sat there with the message before me I knew some one was behind me. That would place the watcher at the window, as the door was on my right, and from the corner of my eye I could make sure no one was there.

Picking up the quill I dipped it in ink and began writing:

To his Excellency, Monsieur Philippe de Vaudreuil, Governor of Canada.

Monsieur: I find myself most unjustly accused of serving the interest of the English colonies to the hurt of France. You, your Excellency, who have been so well acquainted with my activities, and who I flatter myself, have always given me favorable consideration in estimating——

"That paper, if you please, Monsieur Brampton," rang out the cold voice of Bienville.

With assumed surprize I wheeled about. The muzzle of a flintlock pistol of large bore was resting on the sill of the window, and behind it was the stern, implacable, and suspicious countenance of the governor. As I twisted to face the window my body masked the table. My hand gathered up the message to the young woman, and, as I brought up my foot, shoved it inside my moccasin.

"Why—why, your Excellency! This is intolerable. You aim weapons at me! I protest——"

"Enough, Monsieur Brampton!" sharply interrupted the governor. "Where his gracious Majesty's affairs are involved I can not stand on the punctilios of courtesy. Both hands where I can see them. Sergeant, bring me what he has been writing."

In a moment Sergeant Suarez was at my side, a cynical leer on his weathered face, and one brown hand was greedily grabbing my unfinished and thoroughly impromptu note to the governor of Canada.

"I have it, your Excellency; all that he has written," said the sergeant.

The pistol vanished, and Bienville entered the small office and without a glance at me took the sheet of paper and held it to the candle-light. I frowned and waited; and in less than a minute I had the satisfaction of seeing his lips pursed in chagrin.

Replacing the paper on the table he said—"You may go, sergeant."

After Suarez had departed the governor said to me:

"It was a disagreeable necessity. Had you come to my quarters to do your writing my suspicions might not have been aroused. But, entering here, as if to escape espionage——"

He ceased speaking and drummed his fingers on the table, having approached as near to an apology as he cared to do. I replied:

"If I wished to avoid espionage I was unsuccessful. I did approach your quarters, but when I heard the voice of the madman I doubted if I would find the quiet and repose necessary for composing a petition to his Excellency, the governor of Canada."

He bowed his head before the wisdom of this, and curiously asked:

"But what good could such a memorial do you? Long before it could be delivered and answered I should have passed on your case. In no event does Monsieur Vaudreuil have jurisdiction over Biloxi. If innocent you will not have long to wait. If guilty your petition could help you none."

"Your Excellency is in the right of it, as you always are," I sighed; and I began feeding the petition into the candle.

"Nay! Finish your memorial, and I will find some one to take it," he remonstrated.

"But you would not withold judgment against me if Damoan reports me to be a spy. Nor, as you have said, would you keep me a prisoner if proof of guilt is lacking. It was an impulse, your Excellency.

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I am glad you interrupted me. But I do hold the interruption might have been more gracefully accomplished."

His face flushed with annoyance, yet he ever had a better control of his temper than did his more impetuous brother Iberville.

"That is finished," he said. "If you will dine with me we shall be served at once."

I rose and bowed and stood aside for him to precede me through the door. I feared I should have no opportunity of speaking with Narbonne; but as we walked toward the governor's quarters I heard the well-known voice raised in a spirited harangue, the audience being a group of grinning soldiers at the gate. A torch in an iron bracket served to light the scene. Dumouy and his companion were just outside the gate and impatient to be off.

That Narbonne and Six Fingers had struck their bargain was shown by the boatmen's lingering, although in great impatience. Six Fingers also was in an evil humor and glared sardonically as his new companion reveled in the most absurd nonsense. Narbonne glimpsed me on the edge of the circle and abruptly ended his talk and pressed forward to greet me. Bienville stood a few paces ahead of me; and I kicked up my foot and retrieved the message and crumpled it in my hand.

"I regret I shall not have your company, *monsieur*," he cried. "I had hoped you could show us where the most lustrous pearls grow along the shore, although my first interest will always be diamonds."

"Monsieur Narbonne, I am always ready to do you a service," I heartily replied, "And at some other time it may be my good fortune to have you command me."

And I extended my hand and gave him a warm English handclasp. I felt his hand jerk as the wad of paper pressed into his palm. Undoubtedly the fellow was mad, and yet on subjects apart from the Mississippi country he could be sane enough. A flicker of intelligence told me he appreciated my desire to secrecy. There was no chance to make a request, and I only hoped a glance at the message would result in the young woman receiving the writing. My nerves ceased jumping as I felt him palming the paper.

"It has been good to meet you, *monsieur*," he somewhat stiffly returned. "Till we meet again at my plantation. I shall go in much for silk-worms, using the Indian girls and children for the delicate task of caring for the worms."

And with one of his exaggerated bows he was backing toward the sullen pirate and the impatient boatmen.

Bienville glanced after them as they vanished in the night now lining the shore, and murmured—

"You rather fancy Monsieur Narbonne."

"A good fellow, even if a little cracked. He is living a tragedy and is trying to forget it by pretending it is a comedy. He sank his whole fortune in a grant of land over here. His awakening has been rude."

"His grant is on the Arkansas, adjoining that of Monseigneur L'as. He has no cause to complain if he will but develop his property," curtly replied the governor.

"But when Law can not send any of his promised fifteen hundred colonists to the Arkansas how can this inexperienced young man secure immigrants?"

"How do you know that no colonists have gone to the L'as grant on the Arkansas?" he sternly inquired.

"Every one passing New Orleans knows that his Alsatians have settled near that place," I defended.

"This is poor sauce for our dinner," he abruptly said. "I forget I am your host."

From then on Sieur de Bienville was charming. He referred in no way to my dubious position, and he extended to me those little attentions that are so natural in his race, and which, I am forced to believe, must spring from an innate kindness of heart. Only once was my personal standing involved in our table-talk, and that when I ventured to ask—

"Is there any objection to my visiting Mobile while waiting for Damoan's report?"

"Be patient a bit, and perhaps we can go there together." (Meaning, of course if Damoan gave me a clean slate.) "I should like to entertain you at my home. I built it last year. It's a league from Mobile and on the sea, and very pleasantly located, I think. I shall grow oranges there."

His manner discouraged further requests, and as if to avoid a recurrence of the subject he entered on a lively discourse upon the English and the French manner of occupying a country. "The priest was the first of the French to visit aborigines and the

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trader was first of my people," he said. This led him into warm praise of the Jesuits, whom he greatly admired, although he readily admitted they never exercised the same influence over the lower river Indians as they did over the Canadian.

As for Hennepin, the Recollet priest, he had nothing but condemnation. Not only did he roundly denounce him for being jealous of La Salle, and for publishing a fictitious account of a trip down the Mississippi, but he held it to be a great offense that the worthless description of the country should have been dedicated to William III of England. I could not quite follow this line of reasoning, for it was no compliment to any monarch to have such a hodge-podge of lies inscribed to him.

In referring to Father Davion, driven in by the Tunicas, and to Father Foucault, killed by the Koroas, he revealed the inexorable side of his nature, his "blood for blood" judgments, by reminding me with much relish how he paid liberal rewards for the murderers' scalps. It was his one strong point in his management of the Indian tribes. Practically neglected at times by France, with the different tribes refraining from killing him and his handful of men so they might continue securing trade-goods and gifts he always followed one pattern of justice—blood always called for blood. As this was the aboriginal point of view the policy always had their respect even when demanding toll.

He also had a fling at Cadillac, his eccentric predecessor, and said of him among other things—

"He always said the opposite of what he believed."

He sneered at Cadillac for not suspecting that the silver found in the lake country was carried there from Mexico; and in the next breath he expressed absolute confidence in all of Law's plans. In support of this piece of credulity he proudly related the history of Law's financiering, and contrasted France at the beginning of the great gambler's schemes with its present condition.

He pictured Law finding a bankrupt empire, an unpaid army and a starving peasantry, with the *billets d'état* going to a discount of seventy per cent., and then boasted of how the magician had eliminated, or changed these evils. Now the peasants could make fortunes. Luxuries were within the reach of all who would reach for them, regardless of former poverty. France was feverishly prosperous. Paris was the center of the world.

And yet he was firm in his conviction that the future of Louisiana lay in agriculture, not in mines; and he insisted that the colonists should be selected with this thought in view. He was most eloquent on the advantages of having New Orleans the seat of government, and mentioned Sieur Pauger's engineering scheme for compelling the river to clean its channel and eliminate the sand-bar at the entrance by blocking all but one mouth and by increasing the current by narrowing the stream through a system of jetties. I was hard put to hide a smile. It was as fantastic as any of the miracles exploited by Law's company.*

I refused a bed in his quarters, for I was his prisoner. Nor did I care to be too much under his thumb should I discover an opportunity of escaping. So, after his courteous good night, I went to the barracks, where Sergeant Suarez sullenly showed me a bunk. Very soon I decided my outdoor life had unfitted me for sleeping under cover. I took my robes and went outside and arranged my bed under the oaks. As I lay down three figures passed me and took up positions between me and the shore, the woods to the north and the woods to the west. Doubtless there were sharp eyes between me and the woods at the east.

"Who is it?" I asked the nearest figure.

"Only the sergeant and some of the men, who, like yourself, *monsieur*, cannot sleep in the barracks because of the heat."

"At least give them permission to sit down," I suggested; whereat I heard him spit out a mouthful of oaths.

This espionage was extremely irritating. It accented the danger of my being in Biloxi when Damoan the Fox arrived. When I allowed my thoughts to dwell on the Fox I sensed a shock—as if some goblin had taken me by the ears and doused me into ice-water. For my report on Canada, so idiotically confided to the Fox, was my death-warrant. That one slip left me powerless to face the fellow down did he return. How completely he had deceived me was shown by my trusting the data to his care.

*One hundred and fifty years later Captain Eads was to use this same "scheme" with complete success. H. P.

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The danger from the Fox had seemed rather remote until the sentinels surrounded me that night; then it closed about me and smothered me, and I remained awake for hours trying to arrive at some sensible plan for leaving Biloxi and reaching New Orleans and keeping my appointment with the girl. When the sun rose I had advanced a single step. I would give the impression I was interested in Pensacola. That would be my logical haven if I tried to escape.

TO BE CONTINUED

The RAT-CATCHER

A Complete Novelette by VIOLA RANSOM WOOD

THE first Galeburg knew of Steve May—as the stranger called himself—he had stepped into the rope-splicer's job at the packing-house and bought one of those tumble-down shacks over by the abandoned smelter works.

Questioned as to what he meant to do with this property, May announced he was going to build a house and settle down. He was tired of living on board ship, of being bossed whether on duty or off. He'd saved some money and was going to live a free man's life henceforward. Work, as the boss directed, when he worked, and when it came to playtime, he'd do as he good-and-well pleased.

His recently acquired associates around the plant listened to it all politely. But as soon as May's back was turned they were jeeringly commenting among themselves how easily a sailor and his money were parted.

When he started tearing down the old clapboard ruin they looked on smilingly. The substantial concrete foundation the wrecking brought to view did not lessen their attitude of derision. When he immediately reared an attractive shingle bungalow on this ready-made basement, painted it a dark green with a red roof, strung chicken-netting around the rest of the plot and bargained with Louis Aubépine for a "start" of pure breed pit games, some of his fellow employees—particularly old Pat Donovan—no longer hid opinions behind the palms of their hands. They came out frankly and told him he was a fool.

The idea of building a regular Hollywood dwelling out there on the bay's edge, in the midst of that old smelter junk where all Galeburg had been dumping its empty tin cans for the past ten years! A full mile and three-quarters from the nearest neighbor and paved streets—and not even on the trolley line! He was crazy—that was all!

As for the poor little chickens—fighters, though they were—they'd stand no show at all. A twelve-foot netting fence wouldn't keep out the sea-gulls. Unless Steve held an umbrella over the chicks while they were feeding those salt-water scavengers would starve the games to death.

Steve May, though, was a small man who doggedly wore a carefully trimmed beard in a community of smooth-shaven

"The Rat-Catcher," copyright, 1923, by Viola Ransom Wood.

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faces. That alone hinted at his strongest characteristic, tenacity. So, when Galeburg remarked and predicted, his reply was an invariable, "Is that so?" And he kept right on attending to his own affairs.

These consisted, first, in being the best rope-splicer that the Galeburg Packing Company had ever employed. What Steve May's nimble fingers couldn't do with a rope no sailor had ever thought of attempting. His knots were simple and intricate marvels of speed, tensile strength and durability. Scarcely an hour passed in which the chief engineer was not made to see by demonstration that his latest rope-splicer knew his trade.

This caused the chief to regret past bungling makeshifts which had paved the way for certain inevitable changes the future now held in store for the mechanical department. Had Steve May been on the pay-roll before the crises occurred in department after department, steam power wouldn't have gone down to defeat before that modern giant force—electricity.

Such efficiency, however, didn't effect the attitude adopted by old Pat, official watchman at the packing-house gate. He disliked Steve from the first. They were as incompatible as slow and nimble wits can be. In spite of being only five-feet-three to Pat's six-feet-one, the stranger had a way of looking the gateman squarely in the eyes while answering, with an insolent grin, whatever personal questions the big man asked that were none of his business.

This initial antagonism, though, was to be nothing compared with what followed the finishing of the house and penning of the chickens, for Steve May immediately started lugging a gunny-sack out the employees' gate when the five o'clock quitting whistle blew. According to company rules, Pat was obliged, day after day, to inspect its contents, though what he saw threatened the enjoyability of his supper and left him the uneasy prey of sharpened and unsatisfied curiosity.

"And what do yez do with the —— rats, Steve?"

That was the monotonous question, asked evening after evening, as the rope-splicer let down the sack, opening it cautiously that the guardian of the gate might peer in to convince himself, loathesomely, that no valuable G. P. C. property was being carried off the premises.

"Oh, me? I pickle them in vinegar, Pat. Nothing like a pickled rat to sour a fighting cock's disposition. That's how I keep them so mean that the sea-gulls are afraid of them."

Daily that was the substance of the mocking answer, and always it left the big, bluff Irishman grimacing in nauseated disgust. He couldn't let the man pass, though, with that squirming, squealing sack-load without bidding for a repetition of such details. It simply wasn't human for a man to catch rats. The fact tormented him. It became like a sore tooth, against which he couldn't resist sucking his tongue.

ONE evening in late September, Louis Aubépine passed through the gate on Steve May's heels.

"Ivery mon to his taste, I say," old Pat stopped him to remark conversationally, with a significant nod at the other departing employee. "But ——, now, if I'd eat a pickled rat, nor any other kind of a rat, if I was a chick!"

"Same it is here, Pat," promptly responded the fat little naturalized Frenchman, a derisive smile twisting one corner of his mouth.

He had been an oiler in the engine-room of the packing-house for more years than Steve May had been months on the chief's pay-roll, and during this time he and old Pat had become more or less friends. They bet on the same chickens. And as Louis' White Hackles made a habit of wielding a disastrous spur, the Donovan cellar usually harbored something besides potatoes.

Then, too, Louis was lazily fond of spinning a yarn, and had an inexhaustible fund of questionable adventures to relate of his one trip "clear around the world" after he'd fallen heir to "a bunch of money back in Ploudalmezeau." These tales delighted the older man of narrower and more prosaic horizons.

But what added most, perhaps, to his and Aubépine's congeniality, Louis never used incomprehensible sarcasm. He didn't always talk smooth-flowing English, but on the other hand, he didn't make it a point to speak in riddles, or in the manner of one talking with tongue in cheek. Steve May did.

"No, I feed my game-cocks in the usual way," went on the oiler, still smiling with half of his mouth. Then, motioning the

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other man to lean his ear closer—for Louis, himself, measured only five-feet-four—confided guardedly: "Along this New Year time, there's going to be another fight to the death. Between my Tattered Hobo and his blood-brother, Peachey, who's eating the pickled rats. We'll see, if grain and good table scraps can be licked by vinagered dispositions."

He winked, grinningly confident, as the older man spat disgust over the thought that was as revolting as it was fascinating.

"The —— rat-catcher! Just you let me know when it's to be, Louis. I'll help ye cheer Hobo to glory. Him and his —— pickles spoil me supper ivery night—plague him! 'Tis gettin' on me mind so, I can't enjoy a pig's foot any more!"

Thus the Fall months drifted by into early Winter. Never a quitting hour passed in which old Donovan had no sneering comment or taunting gibe to make as he looked into the disgustingly familiar sack with its daily catch.

Sometimes there were ten, milling and squeaking in there, their little eyes gleaming up at the investigator like hard, black pins. Other times, only two or three. But all during these weeks Steve May passed through the employees' exit just one evening without the sack over shoulder or in hand.

That was in the first week in December.

"How's this?" challenged old Pat, curiosity mingling with surprize when the rope-splicer, half-insolently, waved empty hands, and would have passed on.

Steve made a mocking pretense of not understanding the question just to see old Pat rage. But even as the Irishman's red-rimmed eyes blazed he couldn't forbear angling for the day's quota of rodent information.

"Have yez exterminated the —— rats, now?" he called arrestingly after the bearded man. "If ye have, yer Peachey chick will be out o' luck entirely, when Louis' Hobo starts jabbing the daylights out of 'im on New Year's Day!"

Mockery and insolence alike melted from the twitted man's face. Into his eyes flashed an expression that his tormenter was at loss to analyze off-hand. It wasn't offense personally directed; of that Pat was pretty sure. But what it was about he had no logically based convictions. Deep analytical or deductive reasoning not being in his line of cogitations, it was immediately forgotten when the personal equation was eliminated. He carelessly set it down as another queer twist in the "—— rat-catcher's" incomprehensible complex, and didn't let it worry him.

Had he pondered it, he could scarcely have guessed wildly enough to strike the truth. Its roots were too deeply hidden for superficial identification from a man whose first meeting with Steve May had taken place only a few months before. The flash had been an arc thrown off a high voltage hatred so burningly alive it had guided a man's feet into a hundred alien ports, ever seeking and searching—murder in heart—as he circled the globe.

Finally, it had set a sailor—a student lover of the sea, her moods, her life of freedom—down in a meat-packing establishment, daily trying his revenge-ridden soul still further with an uncongenial landlubber's job.

The flame was there but an instant, and gone the next, while Steve May—as he had chosen to call himself—explained after his own particular manner of harassment how there happened to be no sack.

"Sorry to deprive you of your penny-arcade study in natural history tonight, Pat. But, you see, I came to work this morning without my pipe."

He smiled up into Pat's eyes in the way the gateman could never fathom, and hated for that reason with all the instinctive emotion that prompts a dog to resent laughter which seems directed its way.

"Yer pipe? Is it some —— tobacky, now, that you use to catch them with?"

Curiosity temporarily faded resentment. "How?" had been the sharpest goad in Pat's life since a two-legged rival began competing with the G. P. C. cats. "How do yez catch them?" was the question he'd put in every conceivable way—both directly and adroit—and this was the nearest to an explanation he'd ever received! So eager, therefore, was he to follow up such a promising lead, he had no time to take offense.

Instead of giving a white man's answer, though, Steve May only laughed a trifle more insolently, then heaped another measure of "—— queerness" on to the mystery.

"Read your Browning, Patrick. Read your Browning," he advised cryptically, his eyes mocking, hinting at insult, screened behind innocent phrases.

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"Me Browning? And, who is me Browning, may I ask?" nibbled Curiosity, still eagerly pursuing the single track, ignoring all way stations.

"And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered:
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling:
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—
Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing."

quoted Steve May, and with another sarcastic grin, left the old man.

Pat looked after him, angrily perplexed. Scratching his head, he stood there wondering if he hadn't better tell the Old Man about it. The —— fool might go clean daffy and work some harm around the plant.

To catch rats was crazy enough, but talking poetry was worse. Men of Pat's world simply didn't do it—unless they had been too often down-cellar, or were mentally irresponsible.

"MR. DONOVAN has something important to talk over with you, Mr. Tuel," the secretary announced, ushering Pat into the superintendent's private office next morning.

"Well, what can I do you for?" facetiously questioned the Old Man in the genial manner he adopted with the men when his digestion was normal and his wife and daughters hadn't fetched up the subject of shopping and checks at the breakfast table.

This was a habit of his—inverting the form of greeting, thus turning the prelude to interviews into a mild joke. It not only put the men at their ease, but, also, added oil to tale-bearing tongues.

"Well, ye see, sir, 'tis like this—" and Pat proceeded to tell the tale of the rat-catching according to his own lights.

"How does he manage to catch them?"

Mr. Tuel was interested. The unusual, however—as his question showed—intrigued his curiosity more than Pat's fears of the rope-splicer's unbalanced mental equilibrium alarmed him. The number of rats about the packing-house had been a constant source of annoyance ever since the company had established this plant on the edge of the bay.

Cats had been imported by the score—but only to wax fat on food supplied by tender-hearted employees, rather than to distinguish themselves as rodent fiends. It was good news, this, that some man had unofficially elected himself to be a human rat-trap and was daily carrying numbers of the pests off the premises.

"—— if I know, sir. He says with his pipe. And when I asks what kind o' tobacky he smoked, he spouted a string of poetry, that I couldn't make heads nor tails to."

The boss frowned, completely mystified.

"Poetry?" he repeated interrogatively.

"Yes, sir. About the uncles and cousins a-dancing and prancing, up and down the streets after the —— pipe."

To Pat's astonishment, the superintendent saw something funny in this. He lay back in his swivel chair and burst into a chuckling laugh.

"Browning's 'Pied Piper,' " he said, more to himself than to the man on the opposite side of the desk.

"That's the thing!" Pat's amazement grew. That any one so sane as Mr. Tuel should know such mush by its first name! "That's it! He said for me to read me Browning."

Mr. Tuel straightened up to a more dignified position, but he was still amused. He possessed a keen sense of humor and appreciated it in others. He saw that the newcomer, May, had been spoofing old Pat.

"Do ye think he's crazy in the head, sir?" Pat voiced the mainspring of his errand. "I thought, he might get violent, and smash up something, or kill somebody."

The superintendent got on his sober, business-like mask, and spoke in a flatteringly confidential manner to the man who had proven his value as an eager carrier of tales to headquarters. In this respect, the G. P. C. was no exception to the general rule. Every big industrial concern numbers just such men in its employ as Pat Donovan.

"Don't let the thing worry you any more, Pat. I'll look into it myself. And, thank you for bringing it to my notice, personally, like this. But—between us, you understand, Pat?—there'll be some changes

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going into effect around here very soon now. You've seen that big motor the electrician is installing down in the engine-room, haven't you? Biggest one of its type this side of the Rockies. Well, when that's running—which will be within about six weeks now—it will do away with all the rope-driven machinery around the plant. There will be no more ropes to splice after that. And, with no more ropes——"

He paused significantly.

"The —— rat-catcher will be out of a job," Pat finished with a grin of pleasure.

"So it would seem. There are plenty of rats, all right. But I guess the cats will have to take over their old jobs again. Get back to your gate now, Pat. Somebody's likely to slip past the boy. You're a good gateman, Patrick. I'm easy in my mind when you're out there. You can just leave the door open as you go out."

That night, when the sack was let down for the gateman's inspection, fifteen rats made up the squirming, squealing mass; so Steve May admitted upon being questioned as to the number of the day's catch.

"By golly, you'll founder the —— chickens, Steve," old Pat twitted. "Starve 'em one day and banquet 'em the next, like this."

"Oh, don't lose any sleep over my little beauties, Pat," the rope-splicer retorted, smiling the smile Donovan hated. "I don't set a lean and a fat table. I keep a reserve on hand for the rainy day."

"And, the reserve? Do you keep them on the pianny, now, to sing yez to sleep?"

There was insulting impertinence in the elder man's word and look.

"Do you keep the potatoes in the parlor? Or do you buy them by the dozen like lemons, and live from hand to mouth?" Steve questioned in like sort and, shouldering his animated burden, walked swaggeringly on his way.

"Ye——"

Before he could get the fitting appellation out of the mazes of his slow-winding thoughts, though, Louis Aubépine required a scrutinizing once-over to determine if the box of Christmas Soaps he carried tucked under his fat right arm, bore the regulation store-house "Paid" stamp.

"How is the Hobo coming on, now, Louis?" Pat calmed down to inquire, when the stamp showed O.K.

"Fine—ever so excellent. And—*pst!*" he motioned Pat to lean down, that other passing workmen might not hear the *sotto voce* message. "It is all arrange'. New Year's Day at my house. Then we shall see what we shall see. The Tattered One will kick all the pickled rats the other has eat in two mont' out of him!"

Together they laughed, glancing with one accord at the man now taking the trail, which led under the far span of the viaduct and over the hill toward the site of the old smelter.

ALL through the month of December there was never an evening in which Pat, by the light of an arc-light over the employees' exit, did not look into a well-tenanted sack held open for him by Steve May. There were never less than eight rats in it, and more often twelve or fourteen.

Every evening Donovan had some caustic fling to make. Like:

"The —— Peachey, now, Steve, will be so fat be New Year's time, Hobo will think he's scrappin' a feather cushion!"

But Steve's reply—if he made any save a sarcastic laugh which now and then touched up diamond points in his brooding blue eyes—was to the effect that Pat needn't worry—unless he was betting on Hobo. In that case, he might have to walk to work for a week—if the car company wouldn't open a charge account for a patron who was worthy but financially embarrassed. Which, of course, was sufficient to leave old Pat clawing the air for words to add color to "the —— rat-catcher!"

When New Year's Day came, though, old Pat tasted revenge—not to mention other things. The "—— rat-eater" was taken out of the ring after Tattered Hobo's iron spur had plunged victoriously to the heart. It made no difference to Pat that the fight had been an uneven one from the first; that Peachey began to look dopey the minute he was set down inside that circle of excited fight fans. So great, indeed, was the old man's elation over winning a five-to-one bet off Steve that a boy named Dannie Shay had to tend the gate the balance of the week. Pat got riproariously pickled.

When Steve May came through the gate the next Monday morning with the same old barley sack gripped in his hand along

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with his frugal, paper-wrapped lunch, Pat accosted him in high glee.

"Some more rats, is it, Steve? Isn't one lickin' enough to convince ye that the —— rats, now, is no kind o' grub to be putting in a game-cock's belly?"

"Peachey wasn't used to a crowd," was the overquick alibi made in the dead combatant's defense. "If I'd known that Aubépine was going to have the whole town there, yelling, I wouldn't have let my bird fight. Hobo is a veteran. A noisy bunch didn't scare him. Peachey was nervous."

"Nervous! He was plumb yellow! Looked like he'd like to sneak away and hide his head like an ostrick when Hobo flew at him! 'Twas the —— rats, if yez should ask me! 'Twould make anything yellow to have such mixed in with their feed!"

But Steve May—one more step carefully hewn on the scheme of months' planning—walked on inside the gate without replying.

That night he took out fifteen rats.

Aubépine lingered behind the other departing workmen to whisper again in old Pat's ear, after Steve had passed on with a smile and a swagger.

"He says his Peachey was green, and you fellows made him scare! If just him and me had been there, Hobo would have been the one to get the spur. It *was* Peachey's first scrap. And, he didn't put up the fight, I myself thought. Maybe there *was* something wrong. But *he* has another cock. A black-breasted red that he got off 'Mexie' Perez down at Matwood. He says he's as good, if not better than Peachey. Wants to bet me anything I want to bet, on it. His house against my motor-cycle—anything—that this one—Red Napoleon, he calls him—can kill my Tattered Hobo inside of ten minutes."

"His —— house ain't much to bet—set out there among that smelter junk-heap, where nobody ever goes except dagoes, now and then, after clams," promptly sneered Pat.

"Yes, but for raising the game fowl!" exclaimed fat Louis in disagreement. "It is mos' excellent! It is what I myself should have thought of first! Away from town. Nobody to act the spy, if a little friendly fight is wanted after mass on Sunday. Plenty of green feed. The open field, the pure air, the large runway! Ever since he got it I've been wishing I had not been the fool to have let it lie unpurchased for four years! With me, the neighbors are always having the chip on the shoulder. They tell me, I must do this, and I must not do that, until I am sick of the words. And he, this May, he bought it for a mere nothing, with a concrete basement all ready to build on!"

"Then yez mean to match him again?"

Pat's eyes held an acquisitive light also. That five-to-one had been exceedingly easy money. The prospects of another like it was far from unwelcome.

"In two weeks, yes. It'll take that long to get Hobo in trim again. That —— Peachey made just one pass like I thought he would. That one time, he scratch Hobo on the head—not too deep, as I feared—but like the lightning. I do not understand why he blow up like that!"

"And will yez let any one see?"

Old Pat was more interested in the future than in the past. But Louis shook his head, setting his fat jowls to quivering.

"He won't fight his bird if there's more than him and me to see."

Pat registered disappointment.

"But the bets?" he suggested glumly, after a moment.

Louis laughed in a manner that drew the gateman's gaze in fleeting surprize. He was puzzled just that long. The laugh had sounded singularly familiar—and yet it was decidedly unlike Aubépine's usual placidly lazy mirth.

"Oh, if you say the word, Pat, I might lay a dollar or two for you—along with my motor-cycle."

Pat burst out into a huge guffaw, drowning the last flitting impression of wonderment. He slapped the little fat man resoundingly on the back.

"Let me know the day before, Louis, me b'y. I'll see that ye have the little loose change, then, that's rattling 'round in me poke from these next two pay-days. I don't think much of rat-eaters meself—after watching how easy it was for Hobo to tear the heart half-out of that —— Peachey chick!"

IT WAS the chief electrician who really set the date for this second encounter. He had read the writing on the wall and between the final puffs of a cigaret out on the dock one noon about

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a week later conveyed the information to Steve.

"When our slow speed 'Baby Lucifer' makes its first revolution, Steve, the company will have about as much use for you as a cripple for a pair of roller-skates."

"When will you get her running, chief?"

Into the rope-splicer's eyes was the same passing flash old Pat had seen. It had been there frequently of late. On several occasions, when he and Aubépine were sitting on the dock's edge during the noon hour, smoking pipe and cigaret and discussing the merits of pit and exhibition games, if Louis wasn't looking squarely at him, and Steve thought himself unobserved, uninterested fellow workmen, smoking about them, had also caught fleeting glimpses of that smoldering hate.

But so far as consistent, visible signs were concerned no apparent enmity existed between the two men. They never quarreled, even when their opinions differed in argument over their mutual hobby. To the casual observer, they were merely two small brown-haired, blue-eyed men—one smooth-faced, the other with a well-kept beard—whose names were down on the same pay-roll and who raised game chickens for pastime.

That they didn't walk about arm in arm and proclaim themselves inseparable pals, was to those who saw the inexplicable flashes of intense emotions, no reason to suspect them of being enemies, or anything like that.

Under the circumstances, it wasn't a lead worth following. Steve was "goofy." That was enough explanation. And since they were accustomed to his catching rats and taking them home alive, he would have had to start eating his lunch up on top of the flag-pole, or something like that, to get anything but slighting and superficial attention.

Probably outside of old Pat there wasn't another man among the three hundred workmen at the packing-house who ever remembered the two men while off the job. And, if they did recall them, it was more than likely in passing envy of two strangers who were unmarried when they drifted into Galeburg—Louis four years ahead of Steve—and were still successful evaders of matrimony, who had bought themselves homes and continued to batch in them, doing their own cooking and cleaning, and sending their laundry to the Greek's so-called "French" Laundry.

The chief electrician lost no time in puzzling analysis, either. His smoke finished, he got to his feet, and answered carelessly over his shoulder as he walked away toward his shop—

"Oh, about ten days from now—if I have good luck."

Again the light flashed up—but when the rope-splicer turned his face toward the oiler there was nothing of warning to be seen.

"I'm not sorry of the change," he remarked conversationally. "Will be glad to hear that whistle blow the last time for me. I'm getting sick of smelling this stinking back-water from the bay. I'm itching for the feel of a deck again under my bare feet. Even a load of copra will be sweet perfume beside this infernal fertilizer clinging to everything. What'll you give me, Aubépine, for the anchor I was fool enough to fasten to my hulk when I came here? That is, if you don't win it—which you won't!"

Louis slowly removed his odorous pipe from between discolored teeth. He was always a little slovenly in appearance. If not his unbrushed teeth, it would be a sweaty hat-band, or an oil-soaked shoe, or the habit of "trumpeting" instead of using a handkerchief. Steve, on the other hand, in spite of the feeling of slight disgust and contempt the men held for him on account of the rats, could have sat down beside the most fastidious woman on the street car, without causing her to change, or evince a desire to change, her seat. Which was more than could be said of Louis when his motorcycle refused to travel.

"You mean, you want to sell the house? If you win? Which you won't!"

Steve nodded. He was playing too deep a game to trust his voice for a moment.

"What are you wanting to do that for?" asked Louis curiously—also cautiously, to cover any appearance of haste in driving a bargain.

"In ten days, I'll be looking for another berth—and no more dry land ones! I'm going to ship out of Frisco as soon after as I can. Guess, we'll have the match the day after my job here blows up?"

Thus that was settled. But, in the manner of his race, Louis flirted with the other proposition the rest of the noon-hour. In fact, it wasn't until they were changing

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their clothes in the mechanical department's dressing room that evening that a definite offer was made. Then it was a ridiculous sum. Barely one-third the cost of the bungalow, let alone the chickens and furniture. But Louis never expected Steve to put the stamp of approval on the first bid, like that. He was all prepared to haggle upward, and Steve's prompt, "All right," rather flustered him for a moment.

That evening Louis went home smiling, and Steve went over the hill from the aqueduct smiling, too—and Steve carried seven rats in the sack.

IF STEVE'S smile grew out of confidence in winning the fight, it was a false prophet. Red Napoleon made no better showing against the Hobo than Peachey had before him. And like Peachey, too, he seemed to become listless and lose his grit almost as soon as Steve set him down inside the improvised pit. In less than five minutes, the Hobo's wicked false-spur had pierced his unenthusiastic opponent's brain, ending the fight.

Louis' fat jowls fairly quivered with excitement. His blue eyes gleamed like hard bright pebbles. He could hardly believe his good fortune: a new house, new furniture, a flock of game chickens, though he was uncertain about them—something was wrong there! He'd have to see! And fifteen dollars—side money for old Pat.

On the other hand, Steve May didn't seem unduly cast down that his fighter had been killed, and his worldly possessions subtracted from until he now could claim only what personal belongings might be stuffed in two dunnage bags, and the privilege of remaining in the bungalow until he got his berth and sailed.

That was Sunday.

Wednesday, Steve was waiting at the gate, within earshot of Pat Donovan, when Louis came out trundling his motorcycle.

"Well, I've got good news," the bearded ex-employee announced with no further preliminaries of greeting. "I'm sailing tomorrow noon. On the *Bella Rose* for Balboa. Been through the Suez more times than I've got fingers, but this will be my first glimpse of Panama. I'll probably ship through the Canal on some other boat from there. To New York or Argentine."

He talked jerkily, as one under leashed excitement. But his two listeners—for old Pat never missed a conversation he could hear—merely attributed it to the breathless surge which engulfs one who is on the eve of a long voyage. Pat's thoughts fled momentarily to a far-day, boyhood's departure from Carrigcleena, County Cork, and Louis Aubépine recalled—then shrugged away dulled buzzings of conscience—a hasty leave-taking of *la belle* France fourteen years before.

"I'll bring the deed, and bill of sale for the furniture and game-fowl, over with the keys in the morning," the voyager-to-be called back as he started toward the bungalow for his final night at home on shore. "Will have them here at the gate when you get your check."

True to his word, Steve May was standing—two tightly-stuffed duffel bags at his feet—there at the gate when the arriving G. P. C. men began streaming past the timekeeper's wicket to receive their numbered brass tags.

"Taking any of your —— rats with ye, Steve?" old Pat inquired sarcastically, indicating the dunnage. Then without waiting a reply, added, "Fer a man that has lost house, lot and home—to say nothin' of all his pretty roosters—looks like ye'd try dynamite or sody crackers to stuff their bellies with before ye get into the next fight!"

But Steve made no reply in words, and his glance was not for old Pat, though it was turned briefly that direction. A bothersome buzzing insect might have been given the same meed of attention right then. Steve May's brooding eyes were touched up with little flame-points of light which would have made a close observer think of ruby glints seen in a fully jewelled watch.

He was interested only in the men who were arriving by street-car, jitneys, motorcycles, and on foot. And, as he watched —particularly the motor-cyclists—his hands twiddled with a key-ring on which were strung four keys of varying sizes. There was an air of nervous intensity about him, as if he knew he was about to meet a long-delayed crisis in a life of waiting and searching and hating.

The time of suspense, though, was short. Louis Aubépine was too vitally interested in this particular rendezvous to tag-end the procession past the timekeeper this morning. He rode directly to the employees' gate.

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At sight of the fat oiler in greasy tan coveralls, a calm—deadly calm—air enveloped the watcher. Like a mantel of fog shutting a quivering aspen from challenging sight. When his fingers slipped into his coat pocket after a couple of crackling legal papers, his fingers were free of the slightest tremor.

"So, you got here all right?" Louis called, still astride the machine, his feet on the ground to steady it.

He had entertained doubts over-night, as his interrogative greeting evidenced.

"Bring the deed and keys?" he continued, betraying further uncertainty.

Steve left his luggage leaning against the high board fence within touching distance of the guardian of the gate. He advanced a few steps to wait for Louis to dismount and approach. When they finally faced each other, they stood at such an angle that the interested gateman had a clear view of the brief transaction, and their conversation was, also, as plainly audible.

"Yes, here they are. This one," Steve explained of the keys, "unlocks the front door. This the back. This the gate to the chicken enclosure—and this little one the trap-door down into the cellar. I use it instead of the front basement door. Find it more convenient to bring the grain up through the kitchen that way. I intended it for a garage, so put the door in front. To take the grain out that way, means carrying it clear around the house. So I fixed this trap-door in the back of the kitchen and nailed the other one up."

"And that's everything, I guess," remarked Louis, carefully inspecting the folded papers, then pocketing them along with the keys.

He was in high fettle. He'd been afraid that Steve May would find some reason for protesting the word-of-mouth wager. True a bet is considered as good as a bond among sportsmen. Still he knew, within his own heart, that had Tattered Hobo been carried out of that backyard arena as dead as Red Napoleon, and had his Maple Street property been up on the issue—well, Louis Aubépine's word would have been a poor bond on which to bank!

"Yes, that's all. Everything's fixed up for you."

Without extending his hand for a farewell, such as is customary even among casual acquaintances, Steve went back to the gate and picked up his dunnage. With one bag over his shoulder and the other in his left hand, the only leave-taking he indulged in verbally, he called to the watchman, who had been a silent and interested witness to the transfer:

"So long, Patrick. Be careful somebody don't get past you with half the packing-house in his vest pocket some of these dark nights."

With that laugh which tantalized the older man like the smell of corned beef and cabbage cooking on Friday, he walked to where the street car was standing at the end of the line, trolley turned, ready to journey back into town, past the depot, in another half-minute.

Pat scowled at the departing tormenter a moment, then yelled—

"Well, Louis sure skinned yez proper, for all yer —— rat feed!"

It wasn't brilliant repartee, but it was keen enough to set the two at the gate a-laughing as the former rope-splicer sprinted the last few feet to hop aboard the moving car.

That night at quitting-time Louis was hurrying out with his motor-cycle when old Pat detained him through curiosity.

"When ye going to move in, Louis?"

"Sunday, I think. I'm riding over there now. To feed the fowl and see what furniture of his I'll want to sell, and what to keep."

"Well, if ye find any of his —— rats lying round loose, don't keep 'im to feed to yer white hackles. Toss 'im into the bay. Rats is no sort o' grub to put in a self-respectin' chicken's belly—if you want him to win yer fights, I say."

Louis shrugged almost insolently. Since this last fight he viewed Pat from a different plane. Pat was a renter, with nothing but his weekly wages. He, Louis Aubépine, now was out of that class by a double degree. Didn't he own two completely furnished modern houses? Didn't he ride on a motor-cycle instead of the street car? And didn't he have money in the bank?

"Leave that to me, Pat. I have fought the gamecocks longer even than you have wore the shoes!"

From a man of thirty-eight to another approaching sixty, that could mean but one thing—insult. And there was that, too, in his tone which caused old Pat's eyes to fly wide. He gazed after the little man

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until the motor-cycle passed under the viaduct and went sputtering over the hill toward the smelter.

"By golly, it was so —— like Steve, that for a bit there, I thought I was thinkin' I'd said good-by to the wrong one, now."

And that was the last Pat saw of Louis Aubépine.

The oiler didn't show up for work Friday nor Saturday.

"He's probably movin' right in," said Pat to himself, and waited for Monday to hear the latest report on the newly-acquired establishment.

But Monday there was no Louis. Nor Tuesday, or Wednesday.

Wednesday night, old Pat's boy—his one son among a houseful of girls—got into a row over a pool game down in Tim Sullivan's place. There was a gr-rand ten minute free-for-all that wrecked about everything in the building but the roof and the basement. Among the casualties was Pat's boy, Terry, whose skull had made too swift connections with a near-beer bottle and a billiard cue in rapid succession. For a week it was uncertain if he'd live with concussion of the brain, or die of a fractured skull. X-rays not being available for cases among persons of Donovan's circumstances, it was left for Pat to hang uncertainly over the bed and await the outcome.

So, it wasn't until the following Thursday morning that Dannie Shay was relieved of gate duty and sent back to his regular job of running the lard department elevator.

NINE o'clock that day found the secretary leading the way once more into the superintendent's private office.

"Mr. Donovan wishes to speak with you personally, Mr. Tuel."

"Well, Pat, what can I do you for this morning?"

Again the question was genial and told that shopping and checks had been eliminated from the breakfast menu, and that dyspepsia tablets had done their prescribed work.

"It's like this, sir: Louis Aubépine has dropped from sight. He hasn't been to work since last Thursday week. Two weeks today. And last night, I went around to his house on Maple Street and couldn't raise hide nor hair of him. The neighbors said they hadn't seen him for about two weeks either. And that it was a —— shame for any man to treat his chicks the way he's treated them gamecocks of his'n that he keeps penned up in the back yard. Died—iver one of 'im—for the want of a scrap to eat and a drop to drink. They were stinkin' so bad that the neighbors got together yesterday and buried the last of 'im. They're sayin' as how somebody ought to turn him in to the cops for it."

Then to this, Pat added what he knew about Louis' recent acquisition of the smelter-site bungalow.

"Have you been over to this other place?" asked the superintendent, concerned.

It had come to him casually in conversation with the chief engineer a few days before, that the oiler had been away without explanation, and that a new man had of necessity been hired to fill the place.

"No—but I was thinkin', sir, how some of us ought to go over there and see if he's sick, or anything. I'd have gone meself last night, but the b'y was fussy when I got back from over Maple Street way, and wanted to have the newspapy read to him, so what with pleasin' him and all Louis slipped me mind, until I see he didn't show up this morning again, and Dannie tells me he hadn't seen him a-tall."

"I see." The superintendent rubbed his smooth-shaven chin thoughtfully a moment. Then getting to his feet, he said purposefully: "I'm curious to know the answer, too. He might be sick, as you say. Put Dannie back on the gate for a bit, Pat. We'll hop in my car and drive over there. Find out what's wrong."

The road over the hill from the packing-house to the old abandoned smelter was little less than a trail. The tracks from vehicles, which had hauled building materials for the four room bungalow, were dimmed with time. The laundry Ford, the grocery delivery car and the butcher cart, calling once or twice a week, were the only regular traffic on the road and hadn't made a very deeply defined way. So the superintendent's car was no ambulance for ease as they bounced along over the hill, to come presently to a stop before the green building with its cheerful red roof.

No one seemed at home. The house looked as much deserted as the neighboring tumbled-down structures composing the tangible remains of an industrial bubble which had burst for want of capital, several years before.

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After blowing the horn several times with no response, the two men got out of the car and went up the steps together.

Pat knocked resoundingly on the solid-oak front door. No reply. Only the same abandoned hush all about. The sounds that came to their ears, as they stood there on the porch tensely expectant, were the far-away rumble of a distant train and the occasional eery cry of a sea-gull wheeling low overhead, as if presaging the near approach of a heavy storm.

While Pat was endeavoring to peer through the front window, whose shades were partially raised, but were draped with impenetrable white lace curtains, Mr. Tuel tried the fastening of the door. It gave unexpectedly under his hand. But instead of entering, he shut it quickly and stepped back.

"Perhaps, we'd better take a look around in the back first," he said, feeling suddenly that they couldn't enter another man's house—even though the door was unlocked—unless circumstances really seemed to warrant such an informal investigative procedure. "He may be looking after his chickens."

So together they walked around the bungalow, till stopped by the twelve-foot netting fence.

No Louis there—and inside the inclosure, on the other side of the netting gate, which was held shut by a padlock, locked, the two men counted eleven chickens dead, their bones picked clean by the scavenger birds wheeling and crying about overhead. And from the stench coming from the closed chicken house at the rear of the lot, both guessed that the same condition prevailed there as had in the Maple Street property before the neighbors held an indignation meeting and rid themselves of the nuisance.

"Something *must* be wrong," remarked the superintendent, a worried frown on his face. He shook his head, puzzled, at loss what to do next.

"Yer —— right there must be," agreed old Pat, taking the initiative by starting up the back steps to the only other exit to the bungalow. "Those gamecocks were the pride of Louis' heart."

Banging and knocking here, though, brought no response. And the door was locked.

So back they went to the front entrance—this time going anxiously inside.

THE front room was vacant. A bit cluttered up with newspapers and recent issues of *Grit* but not alarmingly disarranged. It merely appeared as if Steve May had had little of personal value to take along to sea with him from this room and had left it only a trifle distubed. Dust lay deep and unfingered on the reading-table, as well as on the seats and arms of the four solidly comfortable chairs ranged carelessly about on the green grass rug. In fact, the whole room seemed to reflect some of the cleanly habits of a seasoned sailor, and of a bachelor in whom the instincts of home-making were pronounced.

The bedroom, adjoining, they merely looked into from the doorway. The bed was made, covered smoothly with a neat comforter, while the two pillows had cases on them, white but for the film of dust that in here lay as deeply undisturbed as in the living-room. The glass in the dresser mirrored no unusual disarray. The clothes-closet door was open, showing a line of empty hooks and one patent coat-hanger. But there was no one about. Just a pronounced smell of mustiness and a penetrating odor of decay from the chicken yard.

"Can't yez smell his —— rats stinkin' up the whole house?" said Pat, as he and Mr. Tuel proceeded, a little more slowly, across the living-room to the entrance of the dining-room.

"It does need airing in here," agreed the superintendent, opening this inner door, which closed on a stout spring.

Here, too, all was silence and emptiness and order. The table held no uncleared dishes, no traces of interrupted feasts. A dish of browning oranges stood in the center, while its stained oak surface, like that of the reading-table in the other room, showed only dust, unfingered dust. The chairs, the dish-cupboard, told the same story of vacancy. And on a painted shelf in the western corner of the room stood a bright nickeled alarm clock which had run down and stopped at three-twenty-five.

A run-down clock in an unoccupied room for some reason or other has a ghostly effect, and both the searching men noted its presence. They were both feeling a little creepy anyway. The premonition that all wasn't as it should be with the man they came seeking was weighing heavier and heavier on them. The air in this closed and apparently unventilated room was foul with the

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stench which had clung to their nostrils since they came from the chicken pens.

Old Pat had led the investigation in the other rooms, but when it came to opening the kitchen door—which was also fitted with a patent spring that closed it automatically—he stepped back, and conceded the initiative to Mr. Tuel.

But this door between dining-room and kitchen, when opened, disclosed no occupant. The stove was filmed with dust, as were the agate-ware tea-kettle and coffee-pot on the open-wrought back leaf of the range. But on one of the chairs was a lunch-kit—one of those black, japanned tin affairs—and on the drainboard of the sink was a man's greasy-banded gray felt hat, and briar pipe with cold ashes sifted to a little heap on the well-scoured surface.

"Them's his—Louis'." Old Pat's voice was barely above a croaking whisper, and his eyes, which had just a hint of almond in their shape, were taking on the appearance of perfectly-formed, red-rimmed circles.

Stepping over to look closer at these exhibits, the other man stubbed his toe against something on the floor. There was a sharp jangle as keys clashed against keys.

In the floor was a perfectly fitted trap-door, and in the brass-outlined keyhole of its cunningly inlaid lock was inserted one key of several strung on a small ring.

"And them's the keys the —— rat-catcher gave him before he left! I heard him say that one of 'im fit the lock of the trap-door to the basement where he kept his chick feed. Louis must have been going down there to get something fer the chickens to eat."

There was a moment of pregnant silence, while the two men looked at each other, questioning, fearfully hesitant. Their certainty about the source of the sickening odor in the house was undergoing a terrible suspicion of doubt.

"Well, I suppose, we'd better glance around down there," suggested Mr. Tuel, who was of hardier nerve fiber than his companion. "He might have fallen and hurt himself some way."

"L-l-look out y-y-you d-d-don't fall yerself, s-s-s-sir," quavered the now thoroughly upset gateman.

"Why, the door's locked," exclaimed Mr. Tuel a second later. "So, he couldn't have fallen down there."

He looked relieved, as if a burden of horrible suspense had lifted from his shoulders. He started to get up off his knees, where he had been with keys in hand. Then that something that has been responsible for the discovery of the most cunningly hidden crypts, and given rise to the ancient saying, "Murdre will out," caused him to decide to give a cursory glance of investigation, anyway, to this last nook and cranny in the building.

"We had better be sure he isn't hurt down there," he muttered, more to himself than to his companion, and reinserted the key in the lock.

The key had to be used as the lifting leverage, and the door opened hard. There seemed to be a weight attached to it. And as it would only open a certain distance—apparently catching on its hinges or something—the superintendent held it open while old Pat stooped over and peered into the basement—once.

The stench was frightful, and after that one brief glance down into the gray darkness of the cellar, Pat was on his feet with a screech that opened his lungs to capacity.

He was through both dining-room doors, and well on his way to the front of the house before Mr. Tuel could let the trap-door bang shut, and catch him, to hold him for a gibbering explanation.

"Skeleton, Mr. Tuel. A big skeleton—and dead rats all over the floor."

He refused flatly to go back to the kitchen and hold the door open while the other man might glimpse what was there. Not that Mr. Tuel was morbidly curious. He wasn't. He was merely cautious by nature. The type of man that doesn't go off half-cocked in face of panic.

"Come on, then," he ordered abruptly, forced to accept Pat's word uncertified. "Let's get over to town. Perhaps the constable had better look into it first—if you're sure of what you saw."

"God's truth, Mr. Tuel. Skeleton and rats—and all of 'em dead!"

"All right—but I won't vouch for anything but dead chickens till I see for myself. You can do the informing." Grimly the superintendent started the car toward town, just as the first drops of promised rain began to spatter the wind-shield.

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THE rain was pelting across the slits of windows, high up on the north wall of the basement, when the constable and his deputy broke through the basement front door, which had been made wide enough to admit an automobile.

"We'll want some fresh air down in there while we're looking things over," the constable decided after his nose had taken one full whiff inside the front door of the bungalow proper. "Best way to get it is to break in through that garage entrance."

The basement floor was of solid concrete, while the walls—except for about three feet all around, which was also concrete—were of wood, but were covered—sealed almost—with coal-oil tins, of which the city's dumping grounds a few hundred yards further along the bay's edge abounded. Even the door the officers had just forced, and the two narrow slits of windows near the ten-foot ceiling, were covered silvery smooth with them. There was toe-hold for neither man nor rodent on any of the walls or ceiling. And no rat, starving though it might be, could ever have gnawed its way to freedom from this tin-lined pit.

On the floor, strewn all about the room, were the swollen carcasses or musty skeletons of at least three hundred of these rodents. But Pat's imagination had run away with his vision, so far as the other was concerned. He had more than half-expected to see the worst and had visualized it with the aid of some white-washed rocks, placed at the foot of the little stairway, in order that a plunge downward off the third step might be rendered as stunningly painful as possible.

"Thought you said there was the murdered body of Louis Aubépine in there," challenged the constable, coming to the broken door for a breathing space in the fresh air, after his first survey of the basement.

Old Pat was standing by the door in the rain, afraid to go in, and too morbidly curious to remain sensibly in the car with Mr. Tuel while the officers investigated.

"If it ain't him, whose skeleton is it?" almost screeched the nervous old man.

"It ain't nobody's. Nothing in there but some white-washed rocks, and about a million, stinkin' dead rats. I took your word for it, and broke down this door without lookin' through the trap myself! Now, it's a pretty howdy-do! Bustin' into a man's house because he's let some rats die in his basement!"

Old Pat leaned weakly against the outside wall. His face, ordinarily beefy red, shone a deep cream color for a moment in contrast with the rain-darkened green shingles.

"But where is Louis? What's become of him? He's gone, and the —— rat-catcher is gone, and the chickens are all dead!"

Before the constable could formulate a scathing reply, the deputy came from inside of the basement, and Mr. Tuel from the machine.

The deputy was flourishing a roll of notepaper tied around with a streamer of twine.

"Found this hanging from the ceiling back there," he said, handing the paper to his chief.

After the quartet had stepped up on the porch out of the rain, it was Mr. Tuel, who haltingly read aloud a translation of those closely-penned pages, which were written in French:

"On the day that I came home to Ploudalmezeau fourteen years ago, from my first long voyage, and found our mother dead, and that you, my elder brother, had sold our home, stolen what should have been mine, and fled from France, I swore an oath that I would hunt you down, and feed you to the rats!

"Hatred between blood kin is deeper and stronger, wise men say, my Louis, than hatred between unrelated persons. It's truth I affirm. I have never yet seen the man whom I could hate as I have hated you, all through these fourteen years that I have searched the world for you.

"Day and night that oath has never left my thoughts. That I might carry it out, I learned the cock-fighting that you love, and I abominate. And from a Hollander I learned the art of catching live rodents by putting a scent on my hands. All that I learned as I searched. Then I found you—and now you are among the rats!

"You thought I was crazy to be catching them—to feed to my chickens! Bah! I never fed one to the cocks. They ate the meat scraps from the butcher shop, and grain. The rats, I kept for you!

"Do you not remember what our mother so often related about our grandfather, her father, keeping a rat pound in Paris? How the scavenged carcasses flung in there at nightfall were removed in clean white bones the following morning?

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"As the rats gnaw at those fat feet of yours, my Louis, ponder that fact told so long ago. And, also, the fact that you, Louis Aubépine—Maybloom, as they sometimes say it in America—robbed thy brother of what should have been his, that he might marry the girl, who is no more, and whom you betrayed and deserted. Think of those, my Louis, while you know that I, Etienne Aubépine—Steve Maywith-the-bloom-off—have kept my oath and can live henceforward in the peace of both heart and mind.

"I shall think of thy clean white bones tomorrow when I am far out on the Pacific on the *Bella Rose*. For when you go down to get feed for your newly won chickens—a joke that, my Louis, your winning! It was meant for you to win. I gave both Peachey and Red a 'hypo' before I put them into the pit. I wanted you to win this nice little trap I was at such pains to build for you.

"I even lined the basement with *silver* for you, that you might find it easier to remember the francs you stole from me. When you start down to get the feed, where there has never been any feed except now for the rats—the third step will spring the trap.

"The door will open hard, you think—but, oh, it won't be half so hard as the rocks that are waiting, white and silent—like the face of Jeanne, one short month after you left her! But they won't kill you those rocks on which you will fall. The rats will feast—and you will know that they feast—you thief! You brother-robber. You despoiler of innocence!

"And don't think when you pull this from the string by which I fasten it to the ceiling, that it is to speak of a way out of your trap. There is no way out. You have seen your last sun. You are finished. You are like a book the world has read, with a bad taste in the mouth, and closed and thrown on to the garbage heap. The string will come down, and the rats will eat it and the paper—and you. No one will ever know, but you, why your bones mingle with my hunger-strikers, who will feast, and then perish.

"The door above your head, you can see now, is but part of a figure-four trap, such as we used to construct to catch the rabbit, remember, before you let your vileness show to the world."

DUMBNESS of sheer horror held the little group of men silent for a minute or so.

"He has killed him! Don't yez see that it's true, every word I've been tellin' ye? The —— rat-catcher did kill Louis. He says so in there!"

Pat was almost blubbering at being vindicated from the charge of misrepresenting facts to the officer, and at the awfulness contained in that note.

"Then where's his body?" the constable wanted to know, matter-of-factly.

The quartet eyed one another soberly.

"Isn't it in there? In the basement?" Mr. Tuel asked, though he'd been told that it wasn't.

The officers shook emphatic heads.

"Nothing but rats. And rats can't eat a man's bones." This the deputy stated positively.

"You take a look around in the chicken yard," ordered the constable to his assistant. "While you're doing that, I'll give the house a thorough going-over."

But all they found that was new were more dead chickens in the little closed shed in back of the lot—and an old-fashioned gold locket with a shawled, wrinkled woman's picture in it, in under the stove, where it had apparently been flung by a frightened hand.

Old Pat wasn't satisfied, though.

"The —— rat-catcher! The —— fiend! Ye'll set the law on him, be the wireless, won't ye, Mister Gonstable?"

"If we find that this Aubépine has sure enough dropped out of sight, we will," promised the officer.

It was a promise easier given than kept, however, even after it was definitely ascertained that Louis Aubépine had vanished mysteriously, leaving no traces behind him. For when the radio was brought into action in the interests of law and justice, no trace, either, could be found of Steve May, as he had called himself.

There was no *Bella Rose*. And, as two weeks is a long time to remember having seen a well-behaved sailor with two duffel bags, along a deep-water embarcadero, he was lost to pursuit as effectually as the Piper to Hamelin Town. Today, though, over on the Caribbean, aboard first this fruit boat, then that, one might run across a smooth-shaven, blue-eyed, little sailor, about five-feet-three, who sometimes catches

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the ships' rats just for the fun of it, and smiles over grim thoughts as he does it.

While down in the interior of Mexico, in a squalid mining-town where gamecocks are as numerous as brown babies, a fat little Frenchman ekes out an uneasy existence. He has been afraid to look closely at a motor-cycle since he sold his at the Border; afraid to approach within a hundred miles of a sea-coast town; afraid of every officer's uniform, though reason tells him that extradition is but an amusing thought; afraid to write a check, or otherwise send for his money, or to make known his property rights in Galeburg, U. S. A.

But what is most tormenting of all, this little, slovenly, blue-eyed, brown-haired man is afraid to show that he knows one breed of game fowl from another, or is interested in the game pit in any way.

He is sure, deep in his soul, that he barely escaped ambush in that green shingle bungalow with its red roof. There had always been a haunting, familiar something about the rope-splicer, and it took only the chance discovery of the locket—where it had dropped unknown to its owner on the kitchen-floor close to the trap-door—to tell Louis that his brother had trailed him across the world and found him out.

Louis Aubépine held no tender memories about Etienne. Etienne's one pronounced trait after these fourteen years of separation—or so it seemed in that moment as Louis looked at their mother's face in the locket—was getting even for grievances, fancied or real. Since Etienne had found him, kept his identity hidden, and lured him to this out-of-the-way spot—it meant but one thing, Etienne meant to get revenge.

With a cry that was more like the squeak of one of the rats unsuspectedly penned and waiting under his feet, Louis Aubépine threw the locket from him and fled, riding a night and a day, then walking a dozen more before he felt safe from his brother.

In Galeburg, though, the whole thing is still an unsolved mystery. Old Pat Donovan is sure that the rats ate bones and all before they died. And remembering how the erstwhile rope-splicer was in the habit of laughing sarcastically in the face of continued and whetted curiosity, the old man would probably tell you today, should you go down to the G. P. C. gate and mention Steve May:

"'Tis a shame, it is, that they didn't catch him an' hang him! The —— rat-catcher!"

IVORY TREK

by DOUGLAS M. DOLD

Author of "Drums of Doom."

AS THE porters dropped their loads they sprawled listless, silent, utterly worn out and weary.

It was not a good place for a *boma*, this "park" of fever-trees and swollen boled borassus palms. The sun was still high. He was well aware the pursuers were close; that both he and his companion were lost. The river was too near for a camp in sleeping-sickness country. Lion spoor under his very feet added fresh danger to the location.

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Yet James Turnbull, known as the Bwana Kimeriji,* pointed to a blotched, yellow fever-tree (swamp mimosa) and, seating his short, wiry body on a tarpaulin-covered chop-box, mechanically tallied the loads of ivory and *potio* (food) as the Shenzi staggered weakly into the clearing.

A sun-shot, emerald half-light trembled about them. Amongst the spiring trunks grew gnarled, hairy-red barked bushes with glossy leaves and clusters of yellow, waxy fruit. Above them, clinging like ghosts, were the air plants—epiphites with long, tongue-shaped, mottled leaves and angry orange-blossoms; a clump of violent purple orchids clung to a loop of a python-like liana.

A hot, damp wind sighed up the unknown valley, carrying notes of the mysterious river that boomed along in flood. Over them the air slipped, enveloping them with its steamy, enervating heat, smelling faintly of the graveyard and the greenhouse. Overhead the bald blue sky seemed close. Not a cloud shaded the fiery equatorial sun.

All about as far as the eye could see lay the grass. The purgatorial, glistening, gray elephant-grass! Miles on miles of it, silver-gray, swishing, rustling, like a sea of wavy silver.

James Turnbull stared at that scene. There was no turning back for Adler and himself.

Down there, where the river ran like a wet brown snake, the palms drooped as if staring at their own shadows. Small, soft-bodied flies made even the worn-out porters slap, so vicious was their bite. By twos and threes the *safari* stumbled into camp.

Turnbull got to his feet. His "shorts" were torn, his helmet dented and faded until it was gray; and yet there was something indomitable, courageous, about this professional ivory-hunter who with his companion was now being hunted.

His men feared him mightily yet idolized him.

"Amara," he said in a sharp, clear voice, "you tell Bwana Adler I shoot for meat."

The slim, keen-featured Somali smiled and nodded. Turnbull picked up his Mauser; and, pointing at three Lumbwa porters not with his hand but with an odd gesture of his fierce Mohammedan beard, he then stalked out of the clearing into a trail which led riverward. To the right he had noted the flock of cow herons; they would mark elephants or, what was more likely, buffalo.

He slipped out of sight into the gray-walled tunnel of grass that rustled dryly and pulsed with the hidden menace which lurked here, carefully avoiding deep holes made by the elephants that had filled with stagnant water often four feet in depth; also the bush with spines that laced the jointed gray grass. Now he could see nothing but buzzing insects. How he loathed it all! Yet his tired eyes were keen, for upon this shooting depended the evening meal.

Adventure to Turnbull was commonplace, for he made his living poaching in the Belgian Kongo; shooting elephants was his trade. Dully he cursed himself for this particular expedition. He had grown to hate Adler, the Alsatian, who although a great hunter was a beast in human guise.

As he proceeded warily he speculated as to why the Belgian forces had not caught up with them; they had been close two days ago. Turnbull shook his head, which all day had been throbbing with an agony of pain. He felt the fever gaining on him. God! What a fool a man was to sleep in native *bandas* (huts)! He had had it before, and knew it to be tick fever.

Their *potio* was getting low. He could visualize only one good thing about this gray purgatory—the porters could not desert! He lifted his *topi* often, for the heat was terrible. A puff-adder struck at him; he had not seen the bloated folds chevroned in sooty black, so had it blended with the gray grass and the quivering, weaving shadows. The path twisted and turned just as it had twisted and turned for fifteen long, long days; and always he had shot for food and led the *safari*.

It had almost got Turnbull's iron nerve. No hunting in the world is as dangerous as game trails among the elephant-grass, where at any turn one may meet buffalo, lion, elephant or rhino, not to speak of the lesser game.

Many times during the march tragedy had been averted only by Turnbull's straight, quick shooting. Twice he had turned a charging herd of buffalo; three rhinos had been killed by him at close range. If his aim had failed it would have meant death or else a terrific mauling,

* The Master Who Always Smiles.

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which latter in that unknown, unmapped country was as certainly fatal.

To their left rose the crashing of a heavy body. The three Lumbwa froze into soot-black shadows. Turnbull slowly pushed down the safety catch of his rifle and waited. Followed a snorting, snuffling and intermittent crashing, growing fainter.

Again he plodded on. The path was slippery and ruddy red. Here and there were many gorgeous dragon-flies, that poised iridescent in patches of sunlight.

Carefully he picked his way over a seething black line of army ants that crossed the tunneled trail; his boots leaked and were uncomfortable, for the termites had made them almost unwearable.

He could distinctly hear the gurgling of water amongst the reeds. Papyrus now walled the twisting lane; a rotting-leaf smell rose as he drew closer to the river; a clump of sword-grass grazed Turnbull's face; drops of blood appeared as if by magic. Now the water was visible, a coppery-brown, oily stream rushing along, covered with débris of the flood, coming from nowhere rushing to God only knew where. Five days ago they had passed where it boiled over a thirty-foot fall.

JUST here Turnbull got the chance he was looking for. For an instant he caught sight of three shadowy forms; that instant, however, was enough. With an instinctive action he fired four times in such rapid succession that the reports were more like one long, slow explosion.

His Lumbwa darted ahead at a word, their fatigue forgotten; their long knives glimmering as they ran. Near the river-brink lay the two dead water-buck, both killed by spine shots. He sighed; there would be enough meat.

His men, as they cut and skinned, gobbled bits of the raw flesh. They sweated. His face dry and hot; his eyes dull. With trembling fingers he pointed out choice cuts which were to be kept for Adler and himself. Then he measured out a dose of quinin which he carried in his pocket.

He noted the great numbers of crocodiles and ordered the porters to drag the antelope away from the bank.

Back in the camp the small green tent which he shared with Adler had been pitched; the fires had been lighted; many more of the porters had straggled in, each new arrival looking a bit more the worse for wear than the last. From the cliffs to the south came the steady screaming of a fish-eagle.

Turnbull felt dry; he burned; the mottled yellow trunks of the trees seemed to writhe like maculated boas. A vivid sapphire-and-scarlet plantain-eater that flitted through the glaucous light flashed large as a peacock.

In a thick voice he sent back five men to help with the meat. As the porters stacked their loads the piles of curved tusks grew larger and larger. He and Adler had been most successful. Turnbull sat down; if he could only sweat, only keep quiet, the fever might be aborted.

His mind wandered off. If the tusks ever reached a market there would be much money, for there was about four thousand pounds of ivory, counting the hippo teeth. At seven to nine rupees a pound that would fetch— He couldn't do it; his mind whirled. His mind *would* think of the gray grass.

How he hated *it* and Adler, whose biting, metal-hard voice he could now hear mingled with thuds and moaning native cries! The last dozen, all men of Anconi from the neighborhood of Ugoyi and Qwichwi in the Kivu country. Tall, bushy-headed, fierce-eyed men. The last few crawled in, backs bleeding, yet they each carried their tusk of ivory.

Turnbull was aware that the porters stared with terror in their eyes at a point behind him. His spine prickled, for he felt the baleful stare of Adler directed toward him. Somehow Adler fitted this picture where hell had elbowed heaven out; where everything lived by tooth and claw; where the devil took the hindermost.

Turnbull did not look around, for he felt too dizzy and weak and did not wish Adler to know it; he felt as if all his vital energy had been sucked dry, yet his nerves were hypersensitive as might have been the tips of a man's mangled fingers. It was the torturing tension of that mole-like trek through the gray grass, and the fever.

"So you have der camp made early."

There was a pause; Turnbull could almost see the squat, broad figure, legs astraddle, head thrust forward, jaw swung up, the hairy hands playing with the hippo-hide *kiboko* (whip) now wet and sticky with

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blood. The voice continued, edged with sardonic irony:

"Tired, worn-out, hey? Like the day before, like these Anconi dogs! Much trouble I haf had with them; but I shepherd dem goot. Ha! Ha!"

Turnbull spoke in a low, repressed voice; it was hard, for he was sick, and he hated Adler as he knew Adler hated him.

"It is the only camp. I lead this *safari;* don't forget it. It was this patch of brush or the grass. Tonight we march when the moon rises."

Adler, the professional elephant-hunter, moved obliquely and very rapidly. His walk suggested the movement of a crab, due to an almost imperceptible limp.

He stared at Turnbull.

"You have fever."

He spoke as if the knowledge gave him pleasure. He too was on edge; his body cried for alcohol, of which there was none in camp. He licked his lips, which were hidden by a bushy spade beard masking his lower face.

Turnbull's keen, brown eyes, bright with fever, glowing embers of hate, met the small, unsteady, pale-blue eyes of Adler; eyes that darted about angrily; eyes set close under bushy, black brows. With a red bandanna Adler wiped his bulbous nose and mopped the wrinkled forehead after removing his double terai-hat. Turnbull envied the copious sweating of the man. *He* was burning up!

"Der grass is purgatory! Dis place it would make —— to shiver. Yess. For fifteen days I have had no schnapps, no gin. I could crawl up der tree for one swallow! It must end soon. Those cliffs that hem us in—ach, they look like the red hellfire not cold yet.

"Where iss that border we look for? I feel it in my body dat we are in some trap. Der Belgiums, why haf dey not come up with us? We go heavy mit der ivory."

The man's voice had risen, and Turnbull knew that he too felt the agony of tension, the bite of suspense. He was not sorry; but he felt with scorn that Adler was afraid, on the verge of a panic.

"Listen," said Turnbull slowly, picking his words and screwing down the safety-valve of his temper. "Listen, Adler. Three months ago we met for the first time in Entebbe. We were headed for elephant ivory in the Belgian Kongo. We knew it was against the law, poaching; that we would be hunted for; yet we pooled our resources and marched in. I knew I was a fool to come with you, but I made the best of a bad business and played square.

"We were successful, but you insisted on more. When we heard Lurget with a whole company of troops was out after us I told you we had better hop it. But you insisted on going South.

"Then at Lupato I warned you against leaving the canoes so poorly guarded. Then in the country which neither of us knew we had to pull foot and trek east—we couldn't go back—and have had to march blindly.

"Now it is a question of lasting. Our *potio* is nearly gone. I shot two buck a while ago, but the game ahead may be scarce. Our porters are nearly done. Your fault mainly.

"You gave me entire charge in leading us out, yet you almost fought when we came to that unknown river flowing east. You wanted to make rafts. Five days ago when you saw that fall did you think of what would have happened had we taken your advice?

"If this valley leads into a trap I can't help it. There is no pass but the one ahead, no path but by way of the elephant-grass.

"Do you think I like it? This trek is killing me. Yet I'll be —— if I leave one tusk behind!"

Adler nodded his head at this last as he gloated over the piled-up tusks.

"Fifteen miles east is the pass, but what the going will be I can't tell. It may take two days; it may take a week; but it lies east, and the border must be near. Maybe northwestern Rhodesia, maybe the Ruisi country, Kivu or Uganda.

"One thing we do know: This river does not belong in the Kongo system; it flows northeast, which makes me hope it's in the Nile watershed. We know too that it's full of sleeping sickness; that's why we've come upon no natives. Where the Belgians are I don't pretend to know; but you have your own swinish greediness to thank for this trek!"

The porters whispered in low voices. From the river came splashings and the low barking of baboons. Over the edge of the eroded cliffs, tinting the elephant-grass, the sun sank, a ball of scorching vermilion.

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The sky had become deep, vivid green. Then it was dark.

About their fires the blacks wolfed great hunks of scorched meat, cutting such portions as would not enter their mouths with the tinkling, curved knives.

In spite of his uttermost efforts Turnbull's mind painted pictures which he knew were unreal. He seemed to see Adler, swollen with passion and cruelty, driving the blacks with his whip, each staggering under a great elephant tusk.

Shadows leaped and danced among the tree-trunks; frogs along the river-bank brayed, boomed and whistled; from everywhere came the shrill, insistent note of insects; the fragrance of nocturnal flowers mingled with the smoke of the fires. Adler sat relaxed, yet there was an air of alert attention about the man.

Staring at Turnbull, he said:

"I don't see why you use der big bore gun. Now der flat-trajectory, high-veloc-ity, two-twenty-six Mannlicher is der best arm——"

Turnbull heard him but did not answer; it was the same old argument; every camp-fire heard this talk. He was on fire and longed for water but did not dare drink from the pool near by until the water had been boiled. He had seen too many men die of dysentery. Idly he wondered what had caused Adler to stop talking.

Soon the moon would be up. Out on the back trail he heard a sound like a dragging, limping step.

Adler spoke to his gun-bearer, a lanky, pockmarked Soudanese—

"Go kill me that leopard!"

The big-savage leered, picked up a heavy spear and disappeared into the dark behind the camp. While Turnbull's mind was retarded by the pain in his head, yet to him this order was ridiculous, sending a single savage out into the grass with only a spear; moreover the sound had not been that of a leopard.

"Where is Amara?" Turnbull asked suddenly.

He did not see Adler start, yet he sensed the man's insincerity in the negative reply. He also sensed the fact that the porters were staring at the Alsatian. With a tremendous effort Turnbull stood up.

"You say you didn't see him. I sent him out to help you and tell you not to drive the men too hard, that camp was set and I had gone for meat."

Adler opened his mouth, margined all round with black, bristling hair. He never uttered the words, for a long shriek cut the silence. Then followed a tense breath-holding. The night ceased to be vocal.

Then slowly with tottering steps a man stumbled into the firelight. His head was bloody and caked with mud and bits of grass; in his right hand he grasped a long knife which dripped glistening drops. The man was Amara.

Adler sprang forward as if to strike the injured Somali.

"Stop!"

Turnbull's word exploded. Adler paused, cursing.

"What is it, Amara?" asked Turnbull, who was afraid he knew, thinking of Adler's order to Taritibo the Sudanese.

"The Bwana Adler hit me. It was when I spoke your words, Bwana Kimeriji, to him. He hit me and kicked me and left me thinking me dead. See, my head; it was here he struck with the edged handle of the *kiboko*. I have come as soon as my legs could bear me. Out there came Taritibo; he would have killed me with a spear had I not seen him and killed him with this knife."

Adler's beady eyes grew suffused; his words boiled. Yet Turnbull knew Amara's story was literally true. Adler's hairy fists were raised menacingly. Amara with slitted lids crouched, bloody knife held ready.

Back about the fires the porters in a wide ring stared, squatting on their haunches, frightened and watchful. They were glad Taritibo was dead, and they hoped Bwana Kimeriji would kill also the hairy-faced one. Turnbull stood rigid and tense, glaring at Adler, his fever forgotten, only the burning anger for the man who stared, mouthing polyglot curses; whose fists threatened.

In a hot, thick voice Turnbull asked—

"Is this story true?"

"No, no, no; der——"

"You swine, you lie. I'm going to beat you within an inch of your dirty life. You'll get your guts full of fighting now. Stop—You would, would you?"

Adler reached for his Luger. Quick as a striking mamba Turnbull's fist shot out. All the hate, all the flaming rage he felt, plus the force of his one hundred and fifty pounds of bone and muscle was back of the blow. The impact smashed like a pistol-shot, sharp and clear. Its very force almost toppled Turnbull.

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Adler's hand dropped the drawn pistol. Amara glided forward, stooped, picked it up and hid it in his torn khaki shirt. Adler flew back in an arc landing with a dull thump.

Turnbull, murderous mad, stood watching the limp, motionless figure. There is little doubt that had Adler so much as stirred Turnbull would have killed him then and there.

The porters leaned forward, breathing deeply, their faces lit with ruddy furnace highlights.

In and out rushed the shadows. A misty vapor rose from the grass and river. The gray grass swished and rattled, dryly strigilous; the voices of a thousand thousand insects once more made the night hideous; the porters hissed as they drew in their breath—never before had they seen white men fight. Turnbull's face, gray under its bronze, still stared.

Adler sprawled silent, his bushy beard vertical. Turnbull was not sorry, for if the man was dead the world was rid of a beast.

Finally he turned and swayed, tottering into the tent, where he fell sprawling, face down upon the cot.

Had he become unconscious earlier it is certain that Amara the Somali would have killed Adler. Had Adler recovered before Turnbull fell into the stupor of delirium it is likely that Turnbull, who had few scruples on such matters, would have put an end to the Alsatian. As it was Adler sat up, grunted and sprang to his feet almost at the exact moment when Turnbull fell unconscious.

Amara fired one shot which broke the Alsatian's arm. He pulled the trigger again, but the Luger jammed, and he was forced to flee before the rain of shots sent flying after him by Adler, who had picked up a rifle near by. As he vanished into the grass Adler furiously ordered a search, the result of which was futile, as Adler well knew it would be.

Adler stepped over to the cot, where he stood staring down on the helpless form, which lay stirring restlessly and muttering. The Alsatian's eyes were hateful by the moon's light, which splattered into the glade, ghostly wan and white. His left hand crept to his hunting-knife; he hesitated; then with his face lit by a fiendish grin he whispered—

"*Ach*—well, I have it."

He began unlacing Turnbull's boots; these together with topi, guns and spine-pad, he packed.

"He is dead," he said answering the inquiring, almost hostile, looks of Turnbull's men. "Now let us be going."

"But, *bwana*, we are tired," expostulated one of the Lumbwa.

"Dogs!" Adler spat the word, and the native cowered. "You are tired, you say. What of it? The *bwana* Turnbull—he was a weak fool—can no longer lead you. You are my men; and to my men I will give much *backsheesha*. When you return to your huts you will be rich men. But—" he scowled fiercely, his voice rasped—"should you choose to consider yourselves to be still the men of this dead one, you stay here and die, for there will be no food. Also—there is this."

His revolver swept in a half-circle, threatening in turn each member of the *safari;* and each one met the threat with a sheepish grin.

"You are our *bwana*," said the man who had protested against continuing the march, and the others sullenly echoed him.

Adler sighed with relief. It had been easier than he expected.

"Pick up your loads," he commanded. "We have wasted too much time."

At his order the Lumbwa men took the trail first, the Anconi—his men—bringing up the rear.

Adler smiled as he followed, and rapidly passed them—for now *he* must lead them.

This was better, he reflected, than merely killing the man he hated. He only wished he might be near when Turnbull—shoeless, hatless, with no guns—awoke!

ONLY the crackling of jointed gray grass and the swish of its sharp tips showed where the *safari*, led by the smiling Adler, had gone.

With them they carried all the treasure of ivory. Amara from his hiding-place, alone watched them go, his face a mask of impotent, hating fury. Later he crept over to Turnbull, who clawed feebly at the rusty red soil silvered by the moonlight.

The hot steamy mist rose still higher, hiding all.

TWO days later when Turnbull became conscious again he stared about amazed. He lay in a small newly made *banda* of palm midriffs and grass. Amara leaned over him; Amara,

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whose face was still bruised and swollen; yet the Somali flashed his white-toothed smile at the master he loved. Turnbull hungrily ate of the plantains and roast guinea-fowl, the latter captured by Amara's snares.

"Tell me all," he said.

Tersely, truthfully the Somali related the facts, adding that Turnbull had been for two days full of devils and demons; that a lion had prowled close, but with fire he had terrified the *simba*. As the tale of the terrible treachery unfolded; as he realized his desertion, Turnbull's face grew set; his fists clenched; but he said nothing. He knew that without boots he could walk no distance in this country; that even with boots, without sun-helmet and spine-pad a white man would last only a short time. Adler had deliberately planned his slow-torturing murder!

For a long time he sat in the *banda* opening. Amara watched him furtively, for he too was aware of their desperate straits.

"Fetch me plantain-leaves and bark if there be no hide nor cloth left," Turnbull ordered.

It was not long before Turnbull had a rude but serviceable sun-hat and spine-pad woven and constructed from banana-leaves and strengthened with climbing palms or rattans; and Amara plaited sandals from the tough, hairy bark fiber of the scrubby, laurel-like bushes. He sang a song of vengeance as he worked, for he knew that Bwana Kimeriji planned; yet when he learned of the plan, it took all his fatalistic Mohammedan belief in Allah, and even then his voice quavered as he replied—

"*Bwana*, it is well."

Turnbull was aware that if he was to overtake Adler and the burdened *safari* he must do it before they reached the pass. This in his condition would be impossible by the trail taken by the *safari*. He was very suspicious, for Adler might set traps in case of just such a contingency.

Long ago the Belgian pursuit should have made its appearance if it came by this route. On one point he was certain: His proposed course would have no traps other than those set by Nature.

His eyes glowed as he worked on the raft, a frail thing of two partially rotted borassus-palm boles, a few midriffs and many bundles of dry elephant-grass bound together by exceedingly tough and strong lianas. If he and Amara ever won through the perils of the unknown river God help Adler!

It spoke wonders that not one objection was even hinted at by Amara; yet above all things he feared the terrors of that swollen river. Turnbull feared it too, but he realized that by it alone had they any chance of overtaking the *safari*.

He was fully cognizant of the fact that very likely they would never reach that pass, for the falls which lay behind might be and were in all likelihood duplicated ahead.

Turnbull had repaired the Luger that Amara had taken from Adler. He retained this as his weapon, while Amara, lashing his heavy knife to a reed, had formed a strong, keen-bladed spear. All afternoon they sweated in the steamy heat close by the river-bank. About them lemon-colored lily-trotters hopped from leaf to leaf; cormorants dived, while a number of razor-billed storks fished in shimmering pools. The crocodiles watched them toil, floating past them like decayed logs patched by moss.

At moonrise they would embark on their desperate venture, their last hope.

They constructed clumsy paddles, and as soon as the sun slid down it became dark, as if a band of black velvet had been tied over their eyes. Each sat brooding and staring into the fire, which flickered feebly, each in his own way wondering.

Once more the river steamed; the cliffs trembled out their stored-up heat of the day; far away a crocodile bellowed; a thousand brilliant stars glittered. Shadows seemed to gather, suggesting terrors and horrors of the vast immensity; a gusty, warm wind had begun to blow; from far above them the petals of a flowering vine pattered down in a perfumed snow. Then the great white moon floated up over the carved cliff; it lighted the mist above the river, streamed over the gray monotony of the grass. To every thing was given an air of unsubstantiality by the white light. Two silent-winged bats flitted about the palms to which their raft was moored.

Now there was shadow only under the dark eastern scarp where the blackness brooded over the hot desolation.

Turnbull looked fiercely vital as he stepped on to the flimsy raft.

"*M' jo*," (Come) he said to Amara.

Carefully they tied each other to the

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raft with their liana cables, took paddles and cast off. It was not easy going, for the river was rapid and the current full of floating débris.

Very soon they ran into a rapid; but more by good luck than skill they dashed through with no more accident than a thorough drenching and the loss of a portion of their raft.

Yet as they slid silently along each felt real fear, for the river was alive with crocodiles and hippos. Upsetting would mean short shrift and a meal for some hungry croc. Each knew this and set his jaw the tighter.

Occasionally, borne against the wind, there came to them a low, distant rumble. Neither knew what it was, and each was afraid; yet neither man nor servant thought of landing. To Turnbull it seemed that the cliffs had marched closer, that they loomed higher, more menacing. The river too was quickening its pace. The pass which was their objective they had lost sight of as the river had so wound as to hide its yawning cleft.

By a chute of oily, black water, they were shot into a pool. Here to their consternation was a herd of hippotomi splashing, while on a sand-spit two bulls roared in husky, bellowing voices as they fought. Both Turnbull and Amara were aware of their immediate danger. Very carefully and with utmost quiet they endeavored to paddle through the herd.

Their effort had almost succeeded when one of the bulls spied them and charged. He dashed splashing through the shallow water, then dived. The other bull pursued him. Turnbull and Amara paddled desperately, but before they had advanced ten yards the water swirled, and a shape arose not five feet from them.

Turnbull waited, pistol cocked. It seemed to him that the water rushed by them with increasing rapidity. He saw the bull hippo open immense jaws; the tusks gleamed as he swam for the flimsy raft with mouth open, nostrils wide, like the muzzle of a small cannon. Turnbull leaned and shoved the pistol-barrel almost into one of the great nostrils and pressed the trigger. The gun did not go off! He pulled the trigger again. This time the pistol discharged with a dull, muffled report; but not before the hippo's jaws had closed over the sides of the raft and torn out a large section.

Before they could examine to what extent they had been damaged they were swept into a racing, mad current which rushed boiling between rocky gorges where a thin stream of moonlight fell on the northern wall. Jagged, cruel and grim these gorges looked.

From beyond a roaring, dull thunder grew louder as they were swept careening on. Turnbull and Amara now felt that all was over. They had chanced fate and failed. Yet in spite of the apparent hopelessness of their position each paddled frantically to gain the northern bank. Here the rocks were at least visible.

A wet wind cooled their faces. Where the moonlight fell beyond, a dense iridescent mist was visible. Faster and faster raced the raft. Of the hippo bull there was no sign.

Turnbull felt the grass-stems breaking under his clutch. He smiled grimly; he was very literally grasping at a blade of grass in this case eighteen feet long! In the chasm there was pandemonium of crashing, splashing liquid turmoil. The raft shot out on to the brink of a glistening black fall whose bottom they could not see beyond; a leaping, twisting, foamy mist out of which nothing was visible save tongues of water shot like greedy arms groping hungrily.

Into this whirlpool inferno the raft plunged, turned, rolled, was caught, bumped, buried so deep that each of the two tied to it almost choked before they once more shot into mist-laden air, only to be twisted, turned and once more plunged into the depths.

This might have lasted a minute, but to each of the men it seemed an eternity. Finally when nearly drowned they found themselves lying on a sloping boulder apparently not far from the northern wall, gasping, not in the least understanding their position. Still coughing and choking, Amara sat up, looked around him, peered beyond and sank back with a groan. This brought Turnbull up, staring.

Behind them and to the west leaped and swirled the pool of the cataract, backed by the black wall of water silvered by the moon. It was hard to believe that they had come this way.

To the south rose a mighty wall of wet rock, jagged and fretted. Between them and it slid fifty feet of foam-flecked black water. Not so steep, and separated from

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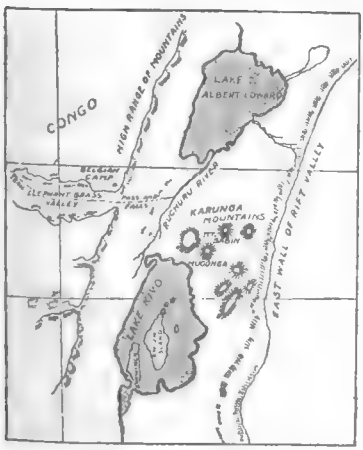
them by ten feet of racing water, rose the northern wall. The rocky island on which they had been swept divided the fall.

To the east, directly ahead of them, lay nothing but trembling, pulsing air. The rock on which they lay jutted out beyond the precipice into space. One look down and Turnbull crouched dizzy and terrified. For a long interval he closed his eyes. Amara, whom he had seen face a charging lion fearlessly, cowered beside him. Only the thought of Adler's triumph made Turnbull once more look.

Far out to the east dawn was breaking. By its first light he saw a purple range of mountains, a range which he recognized as the M'fumbiro. He saw the leaning peak of Sabiin; the smoking cone of Kirungu.



To the south would be the blue waters of Kivu; to the north Lake Albert Edward; down in those parched yellow plains was the border, perhaps not ten miles away. His beard bristled.

Adler *must not* reach that border!

It was not so very far to Entebbe; and he knew the natives, the country. Their present position was on the very lip of the great Rift Valley.

He saw a struggling shape in the water, a shape which as it passed, kicked and splashed, whose great mouth was open. Had he not dragged Amara to one side one of the hippo's hind legs, which rose out of the water as the big beast turned, would have brushed the Somali to his death. Fascinated, the two men stared at the huge animal being torn like a straw impotent, its small eyes full of terror; saw it reach the rim, pause and breaking through the water surface, hurtle into the misty chasm; heard its death scream as it began the terrible drop.

"Amara!"

Turnbull could barely hear his own shout, so he bent and spoke directly into the Somali's ear.

"I shall jump over to the bank. With me I take one end of the vine rope. Close your eyes, and when I make signal, jump!"

He felt Amara's shoulders tremble, but the man's head nodded in assent. Back of them the pool of turmoil was becoming faintly visible. Carefully Turnbull chose a landing-place on the shelving rock. Above projected a spiky granite knob. It would be slippery, and a hand-hold might be necessary. He had little to take off for the jump. Ordinarily this jump would have seemed negligible; but here, with a chasm of unknown depth to his right, where a slip meant instant death, it was very different.

Amara stood wide-eyed, holding up the looped liana rope which had been taken from the raft débris.

Turnbull breathed hard, trying to forget the awful precipice, the roaring waterfall; pictured Adler's gloating, evil face; then bounded forward and leaped. Amara gasped as Turnbull flew through the air. For a moment, under him Turnbull saw the slick, foam-flowered, hurtling water; saw the opposite bank racing up to meet him; for an awful second thought that he would fall short!

He lighted with a splash in a foot or so of water that slid over a sloping rock. Desperately he threw himself forward and clutched the protruding granite; gripping it slowly, he dragged himself beyond the water's pull. By the steely gray light he saw Amara, wide-eyed, raise his arm and run; saw his white gown flutter as he jumped. Amara's leap was poor. Turnbull desperately tugged straining at the liana rope. Would it bear the strain? His feet slipped; he threw one arm over the projecting rock and at last dragged the panting, gasping man to safety.

Slowly and with great caution they began the ascent of the gorge to the pass, which lay perhaps eight hundred feet above them.

The climb was arduous; but so glad were

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these two to get away from the scene of their recent terror, so eaten were they by the hunger of revenge, that they made little of the cliff-climbing. As they came near the summit the climbing became less precipitous. Among the jagged, fang-like boulders grew rank scrub, made up for the most part of plantain. Under the dripping, frayed, green banners which fluttered in the dawn wind the two men crept.

Here the earth was black and peaty, and in the crevices grew marvelous tree-ferns and mosses. About them there was a steady drip. A yellow python glided by.

Now the roar of the fall had become a muffled thunder; bones of men, rotting and crumbling, lay about, lichen-covered, the only remaining signs of some tragedy, perhaps an Arab raid, perhaps the sleeping sickness.

They paused and ate of the small, delicious plantains, disturbing a number of green pigeons and gem-like sunbirds.

Now they crawled forward on their bellies. Turnbull had lost his pistol and was armed only with a heavy rock. Bees hummed all about them, mingled with the sound of crackling fires and the notes of a waking camp.

Turnbull and Amara were famous hunters; not a twig crackled. Each believed that beyond lay Adler's camp. *Their camp.* From the cover of a convolvulus-grown acacia-bush they caught sight of the tents. Turnbull almost gasped. Then he turned to Amara. Both men's eyes gleamed with a peculiar light of mingled perplexity and triumph.

The camp which they looked down into was hidden from the path which angled up to the pass from the elephant-grass country below, and was not Adler's but that of their pursuers, the Belgian forces. Almost at once Turnbull caught sight of Captain Lurget and a brother officer smoking in front of their tent-fly.

In an instant he realized the position. Lurget had driven Adler and himself into this valley whose single outlet he, Lurget, knew! Then he had marched here by way of the plateau and now camped at the exit of his trap, waiting to nab the ivory-poachers before they crossed into German East or the Uganda, whose borders lay to the northeast.

As the two retreated both men smiled, for they knew that Lurget's presence meant that Adler had not as yet arrived.

Crawling to a position near the summit of the pass and some distance beyond the hidden Belgian camp where they could catch the first glimpse of the ivory-laden *safari,* they lay hidden. This took them two hours as great precaution was necessary; for the native forces wandered through a portion of the woods looking for plantain. Behind a clump of bushes and rock they lay peering down on the miles of glistening gray. Somewhere in there moved the *safari.*

So quiet did these two lie that the lizards once more resumed their interrupted hunting for insects. A little hedgehog wandered aimlessly about.

Turnbull had a plan which depended largely on the action of the Belgian officers. It was so bold a plan, so audacious, that Turnbull smiled. Amara took heart as he saw it and sighed in content.

The deep turquoise sky grew brazen toward midday. Then clouds gathered far back in the west. Of Adler there was yet no sign. A few Hausas and Sudanese passed, evidently bent on reconnoitering.

They returned hurriedly.

From the edge of the grass an oribi (small antelope), followed by another, bounded into sight. Turnbull's experienced eye caught the glint of tusks. In all other ways the huge pachyderms were invisible.

THE wind dropped. The low, rumbling roar of the river made each shudder as it rose to them. A colorless, shimmering blanket of oily vapor lay over the gray elephant-grass. The light slowly grew coppery. The heavens literally scowled. The clouds piled higher. It grew darker; a haze obscured the valley.

Now the clouds, blue-black and purple, rolled overhead, showing vast rents and chasms in their drifting forms. A blank, dark wall of rain advanced, roaring as it swept across the valley. A wind shrieked down; the air was filled with flying things. A wall of water made the two watchers gasp for breath. Thunder rattled and cracked all about them. Never had either seen such lightning; it was everywhere!

In the midst of this Adler, leading his *safari* emerged from the grass cover. Lighted by lightning, they saw him stop and wait until the last of the ivory-laden porters struggled from the cover. Turnbull had to confess that the man was stubbornly courageous.

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Slowly the weary *safari* made its way up the streaming slope, constantly lighted by the flashing blue or bright red lightning. They saw Adler wielding a *kiboko* on the stragglers; they watched the weary line stagger past.

Suddenly as it had begun, the rain stopped; the thunder retreated.

Amara's muscles tensed as he glared at Adler. Then from the cover of the path Captain Lurget stepped out, followed by a number of his native troops.

Adler did not hesitate, he did not even listen to Lurget's words, but fired at the officer from the pocket of his tunic. Lurget swayed, clapped his hand to his shoulder and fell.

Adler shot twice before the volley directed at him brought him down. Even then he writhed and fired from the ground, blowing the face off of the Sudanese sergeant that bent over him. All the while he was shouting curses in a high-pitched, unnatural voice; then very suddenly collapsed limp.

As Turnbull had hoped, the two *safaris* were camped apart. Six native troopers guarded the ivory, the Lumbwa and Anconi porters who had been with Adler. Lurget had been carried away on a litter. Turnbull was glad that he was not dead.

The Belgian lieutenant searched the captured belongings, then hurried to his camp.

The body of Adler had been left where it had fallen. When it grew dark Turnbull removed the boots, helmet and other clothes stolen from him by the Alsatian.

"Now pay heed to me, Amara," he said slowly. "You must follow the trail I now lay down for you, turning neither to the right or to the left. As I speak, that must you do. Is it understood?"

"Yes, *bwana*."

"Then listen, and obedience shall win victory. Enter unseen into the *boma* where are the men who call me *bwana*—and the ivory. Take care that none of the Hausa guards hear what you have to say to my men, to whom you must say:

" 'Tonight the *bwana* comes. Be ready and silent.'

"Then go to the guards and to them say this:

" 'The Bwana M'Kubwa Sana Abesa Kimeriji has come back from the place of the dead. He is greater than death; the spirits are at his command. When he speaks, and he wills it, a man dies. He rides at night upon the back of a lion; he strikes with the speed of a snake.* All things are known to him. Beware, then!

" 'Tonight he will appear to you, and his coming may mean death for you all. That this and greater evil may not come to you, fall silently to the ground and cover your eyes with your hands.' "

"Yes, yes, *bwana*. And then?"

Amara's face had grown bright; he was sure success would be theirs, and he delighted in the part he was to play.

"After you have finished speaking to the Hausas I will appear and, because they have heard before of my magic and fear the evil you threaten, they will fall to the ground. Then shall my men bind them and stop their mouths so that they can not cry out.

"The rest is easy. We will steal silently past the Belgian camp, alarming none. Below us is the river, the Rushuru, and beyond that is the border. Once there we will be safe; there they dare not pursue us, because of the Anconi warriors and the Germani. Promise the men much pay. Let them know that this deed will make them great in their villages. Now go."

Amara crawled cautiously toward the camp-fire, slowly followed by Turnbull, meditating. He had nothing in the world but the ivory. It was worth somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty-five thousand pounds. He must recover it—must! Yet in doing so he wished to spill no innocent blood.

From all about came the sound of flapping plantain-leaves. Beyond the camp rock-hyrax were making the night hideous with their cries. The light of the fire silhouetted the native troopers grouped, listening to Amara's words.

It was very dark. Closer and closer crept Turnbull. All must be finished before the moon rose. In the natives' camp Turnbull noted with satisfaction that several of the Lumbwa had drawn close behind the gaping Hausas. He heard Amara say:

"My master the Bwana M'Kubwa Sana Abesa Kimeriji,* shall walk into the firelight and say, 'Down, dogs!' When he says the word, fall lest ye be stricken by the demon which is his to command!"

*The Most Mighty of Mighty Masters Who Always Smiles.

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At these words Turnbull stepped, smiling grimly, from behind the piled-up tusks.

"Down, dogs!" he ordered.

All six Hausas sank groaning to their faces, for they feared the demon, and were as Turnbull had directed securely bound and gagged. Silently the porters took up their loads and, led by Turnbull, stole out of the camp, having first piled the fire high with wood and set the bound men near it. This would lessen their danger from leopards.

Creeping like cats, they glided past the Belgian camp, the porters smiling to themselves as they thought of the merit they would acquire in the eyes of their fellow-tribesmen. Much pay and *backsheesha* would be theirs. For their *bwana* did not lie, and he had promised it.

They descended a steep, zigzag path. Their escape was not discovered for nearly an hour, when the discharges of rifles and muskets, followed by the flickering of torches, warned them that the pursuit had begun.

As the moon rose, Turnbull, marshaling his will and strength, drove the laden men; nursed their energies; talked to them; egged them on as only he knew how to spur the mind of a native.

They reached the plain. Behind, the pursuit had gained. Shots had been fired, but no man among his porters had been hit.

Turnbull was certain that somewhere in this burned-out plain, dotted by grotesque tree euphorbias, was the border. A dry river-bed might mark the invisible line. It was hard going, and the porters sweated and strained. From afar came to them the roar of lions.

Turnbull once more carried his heavy cordite rifle. He marched behind the speeding *safari;* Amara led. The moonlight winked on ivory tusks. The porters' chests heaved, yet their feet padded gamely on.

Their pursuers were closing up rapidly. Unless he stopped them, or unless they reached the border stream first all the struggling, all the hardship, would have been in vain. Now he could distinctly see the Belgian forces being urged on by their white officer. His *safari* was laboring up the sides of a steep hill.

Turnbull was very tired. From ahead Amara raced and shouted. From behind the Belgian officer could be heard bellowing angry orders, followed by a ragged, harmless volley.

Turnbull entered the water after the last porter. Just past the middle of the stream he turned, doffed his helmet and bowed in mock politeness. Then he slowly splashed to the opposite shore, where his porters lay panting, hidden behind the sandy ridge which formed the bank.

He at once sent out messengers to summon the Anconi, whose villages he knew lay within a few miles. And then he took up his position to guard the ford should it prove necessary. He knew that it was highly improbable that the Belgians would cross after him; his skill with a rifle was too well known; and besides they would hardly dare venture into enemy country. Still, with victory almost in sight, he could not afford to take chances.

He waited tensely. His eyes never left the trail leading down to the ford; his finger twitched constantly at the trigger of his rifle.

AN HOUR later he was joined by a shouting mob of Anconi warriors; and with a great sigh of relief, secure in the knowledge that he was among friends, he sought the shadow of a large rock.

A few minutes later he was sleeping soundly and peacefully.

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"WHO FIRES FIRST?"

A Complete Novelette

Pirate Tales from the Law ~ GOW ~ by ARTHUR M. HARRIS

Author of "Back Pay—Avery," "Groan of the Gallows—Greene," etc.

"AS WE eat, so shall we work."

Almost immediately after leaving Amsterdam, old Paterson had set up his insistent croak; from his hammock under the poop when the roaring officers called the shifting watches, on the sleety deck and aloft in the windtaut rigging, and the last thing at night in the great cabin, even at the solemn moment of common prayer, when his captain and master slowly read the form of evening supplication, this ancient and discontented shellback continually muttered his plaint to wind and waves and willing and unwilling ears—

"As we eat, so shall we work."

If looks could kill, the poor cook of the *George* would long since have perished amid his pots and pans, for it was when, at the appointed times, or as the emergencies of the ship demanded, old Paterson rolled with his pannikin and mess-kid to the galley that his obsessing whine became a shriek and his filmy eye burned upon the humble dispenser of the victuals with a consuming hate. Not that the cook, in himself, offended old Paterson, but because he became a symbol of oppressive shipmasters and exacting shipowners who sought to pare another penny of profit from the stringy stomachs of their foremasting slaves.

Justice would indeed be blindfolded—nay, have no eyes at all—if she could not see that old Paterson had some cause for complaint. Little meat and less bread; rum thimbled out as reluctantly as a small boy dividing his lollipops under compulsion—a menu, in fact, made up of tepid water tinctured to the point of tantalizing with suggestions of what might, under proper conditions, have been food, made meager fare for men lashed into crying hunger by the snapping sea-gales.

And when still a long way from Santa Cruz, in the Azores, whither the *George* was bound, the twenty-four men of the crew were put on "short allowance," old Paterson, with his croak, became a soloist now supported by a chorus. "Short allowance—" certainly an artful misuse of the comparative degree—it had always been short, and in truth could only be called shortest.

IN TAKING these pirate tales from the law recourse has been had to the most authentic sources of the subject—the verbatim reports of the court proceedings in which the pirates here portrayed were prosecuted. So far as we are aware, this is the first popular presentation of the subject of piracy from this point of view. This derivation of these articles makes for the special informative value of the series. You have here the accounts of this picturesque class of sea-brigands as the activity of each has been determined by the examination of witnesses, the arguments of counsel, the instructions of judges and the verdicts of juries. In comparison with these records, the narratives of lay writers on the subject of piracy were frequently found to contain mistakes. Where collateral history has been consulted to necessarily supplement matters not concerned in the trials, the most authoritative has been sought. The technical trials themselves may be likened to maps; these stories to paintings faithfully following the maps.

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At Santa Cruz they slugglishly laded the ship with bee's wax, and although the chandlers pressed importunately about the skipper, he gave no order for any considerable increase in the provisions for the homeward voyage. Were they to make the journey back on that misnamed "short allowance?" It rather looked as if they would.

Cargo was stuffed into the hold in plenty, but no fresh sides of beef came to cheer the toiling seamen—no flour, no bread, nothing but a few bottles of wine which, however, went into the great cabin and the custody of the thrifty key. Perhaps provisions would come aboard when the loading was done; at least the younger and less sophisticated men hoped, but old Paterson shook his earrings and clubbed pigtail. He had followed the sea long enough to know the character of his ship.

Among the officers of the ship, the men had but one whom they could look upon as a friend—John Gow, the second mate, a youngish man from the Orkney Islands. A capable sailor was John Gow, yet never too busy to sympathize a moment with the miseries of his men, nor too much the officer to spend a kindly word on an outcast crew.

But what could a second mate do? Was he not simply a block for his superiors to kick with the expectancy that he would pas the compliment on to his subordinates? Exactly.

"As we eat, so shall we work."

John Gow heard the slogan spreading like a kind of vocal slow match to the powder-magazine of disaster and only smiled.

When the bee's wax and other cargo was in, the unmistakable notice of departure appeared in the formal reception by the captain of his charterers. The gentlemen came aboard in their best clothes and were escorted to the quarterdeck, where an awning had been spread against the sun, and a cluster of wine-bottles glowed with their purple prophecy of comfort. From the waist and forward, eyes of envy and dislike turned furtively on the pleasant company aft, merry now in the exchange of compliments.

"We're starting," cried a youth plaintively, "and there's no victuals aboard!"

Old Paterson was not going home on an empty belly. If he knew anything in this world he knew that much. Around him clumped a group of seamen, and somehow, probably with little premeditation, they suddenly started aft and shocked their captain by intruding on the sanctity of the quarterdeck. The merchants leaned back from their bottles and looked as if they thought the end of the world had come. Simply unheard of!

Old Paterson bowed and scraped politely.

"Cap'n," he began with the habitually humble voice before authority, "we're on short allowance. We hope your honor ain't a-goin' home without proper victuals aboard."

His supporters growled their amen. The captain, hardly holding himself in from hurling a chair, a bottle, a tackle-block or anything handy at the presumptuous faces before him, rose up and frigidly replied that there was a steward aboard who had the care of the provisions, and all complaints would be properly redressed. The tarry gang tumbled back to their proper sphere, leaving the captain in a muddle of embarrassment and suspicion—embarrassment for his fractured dignity, suspicion because the intrusion indicated a perhaps germinating rebellion.

Old Paterson leered at his guard of honor.

"As we eat, so shall we work."

The merchants in polite course quitted the ship, and the captain, without commenting on the incident of the afternoon, ordered the anchor up and the sails shaken out. They were starting, and there was not a square meal for one; let alone twenty-four men aboard. Short—shorter—shortest allowance all the way home.

The crew lagged at their work; particularly old Paterson, who crawled into the shrouds so sluggardly that the captain marked him, and in round sea terms demanded why he did not get to unfurling the sails more seamanlike. Old Paterson turned like an aged rattlesnake.

"As we eat, so shall we work."

The captain caught the mutter, and so did John Gow, the second mate. The captain prudently did nothing about it; the second mate grinned and gazed innocently out at the greenish sea.

APPREHENSION—almost premonition—dropped heavily upon the skipper as the day marched to a gray and windy evening. The complaining deputation that had assaulted his quarterdeck in the early afternoon, the open grumbling of old Paterson, and above all no

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doubt a something in the demeanor of the men, which an experienced master might read like the signs of the sky, foreboded the brewing of violence.

He and his mate were standing on the quarterdeck where in the dusk two or three men passed and repassed them on the business of the ship. The mate himself felt the coming of a worse storm than that of wind and wave, and when the captain, bracing himself sufficiently to confess his fears and suggest that small arms should be gathered and placed in his cabin "in case anything should happen," his chief officer, glad to air his secret anxiety, at once set about the business.

And the first thing he did was to call John Gow and order him to attend to the cleaning of the ship's muskets, pistols and cannon.

"Aye, aye, sir," responded Gow, and slipped briskly forward.

Almost at the same time two of the men who had been fumbling with the ropes on the quarterdeck sank down the companion ladder and met the second mate in the forward gloom. The three spoke together closely with much tossing of indicative thumbs over their shoulders.

The arming of the captain's cabin went but tardily; little delays such as lost keys and so forth kept the thing at pause until eight o'clock, the daily hour of divine worship, not to be foregone for anything but an irresistible typhoon. In the "great cabin" as it was called to distinguish it from the lesser cabins of the mate, surgeon and supercargo, one-half of the crew met while the other half kept on deck and worked the ship, thus taking turn and turn about at prayers. The captain stood under the lantern, which jerked and bobbed and anon struck its metal guards sharply against the ceiling with the tumbling of the ship; the pigtailed crowd knelt in a shadowy motley about him; the jumping light threw the blackness off the polished oaken wainscoting or gleamed an instant on the captain's graying head, and again suddenly and sharply picked out a hairy, tattooed arm bracing some worshiper against his lurching chapel.

Against the cabin windows the seas slapped smartly and with a kind of repetition as the movement of the ship turned one side and another into the depths, the cabin door banged explosively with a quick captiousness of the wind; overhead faintly the cries of the navigators could be heard; with it all the reader pursued doggedly the liturgy of that most sublime achievement of the English religious genius, the Book of Common Prayer.

Did he, as his square thumbs turned the pages, light for a moment with chill dread upon the Burial Service?

The arrangement of the watches provided that those who attended the service of prayer should go from there to their hammocks and rest until it was time to relieve the next watch.

"Who fires first?"

A man fully dressed, but without his boots, gently punched one of the bulging hammocks and whispered this strange question to the occupant whose head bobbed up. If the man addressed knew who was to fire first he did not say so, for his only answer to the query was to roll deftly out of his hammock and drop, with a scarcely audible pad of bare feet, to the deck, tightening his belt about his waist and twisting his dirk-scabbard conveniently in front of him.

"Who fires first?"

From one hammock selected from the swaying lines to another the queer question proceeded, always receiving the same reply—tight lips and a quick flop of feet on the deck. Six men had been asked in the gusty darkness who was to fire first; and now, cautiously fingering their way along the deck-works, and in single file, they crept toward the cabins of the first mate, the doctor and the supercargo.

The passageway connecting these small cabins was heavy with the smell of old tobacco, drugs, wine and wet clothing and lighted by one small lantern above the entrance. Softly, softly—a hand gently thrust against a swinging door—a foot across the threshold—and death was laid quickly at the throats of the sleepers.

The mate, however, was a strong man. Clutching his gaping throat convulsively with his two hands, he ran to the deck, only to meet a conclusive volley of pistol-balls.

The captain, hearing the uproar, ran to the deck in his slippered feet, calling out for the cause of it all, to which the boatswain answered that he thought a couple of men had fallen overboard. The captain rushed to the side and gazed into the black waters and immediately was seized by two men, who struggled to hoist him over the bulwark.

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Desperately the victim fought in their grasp; but scarcely had he twisted himself once about, ere, in back and front, the dirk sank into his flesh.

"As we eat, so shall we work," grinned old Paterson, wiping his wet blade on the poor remains.

AMID an infernal hilarity the officers' cabins were now looted. The little chests of personal belongings were smashed in and the contents tumbled out to be grabbed by whoever could get to them first. Watches, cheap trinkets of jewelry, silk handkerchiefs and what little money could be found were divided with shouts of dispute. But two or three boxes containing considerable coins and the property of the ship-owners were withdrawn for more decorous and equitable division.

Everything in the way of liquor was rushed to the quarterdeck, and a night-long orgy ensued. The ship somehow wallowed along while its masters reveled. With a bottle of wine in one hand, the greedily gulped liquid streaming down his bushy beard, and a cutlas in the other, one Williams, a proper rascal, smote his weapon ringingly against a cannon and cried—

"Captain Gow, you are welcome—welcome to your command."

In this way, informally but effectively, Second Mate John Gow accepted his promotion to the office of captain.

Captain Gow politely returned the kindness by saying—

"Mr. Williams, you shall be our lieutenant."

Thereupon the nominations were closed, as parliamentarians say, and the elections unanimously carried. The night went along in a roaring good-humor till the placid eye of morning, slowly opening in the watery east, was shocked to find the decks red with an unholy stain.

As a matter of fact the whole affair had been carried by a group of eight men, six of whom had been summoned from their hammocks by the watchword, "Who fires first?" the remaining two being up on deck. From the circumstance we have just seen, John Gow must have been a party to the criminal enterprise, as he indeed was.

Four men were over the side; eight were conspirators; thus there remained twelve men of the crew more or less neutral. These men fled for hiding to the shrouds, into the hold or anywhere that might shield them from the passionate tempest.

A very similar circumstance has often engaged the interest of the story-tellers. If this were a fictitious narration of the conventional sort this thrilling situation would be artfully resolved by the wonderful recovery of the ship and the ultimate defeat of the mutineers by the faithful and ingenious twelve. If it be permissible to point out the deficiency of such enthralling yarns, as related to practical fact, it would lie in the circumstance that by the time the ship had been recaptured there would not be enough men left alive to work it, and, at least according to the canny calculations of Lloyd's would thereby become an impossible risk.

John Gow had a ship to man, and as no ship probably in all history ever started out with too many hands, generally too few, the *George* must be supposed to have been no exception to the common rule. Hence while Gow might personally have liked to toss all opposition over the bulwarks, he realized that to do so would have been tantamount to wrecking his vessel, so another method of approach to the problem was indicated.

First, however, he had to get his lively eight in hand. As the morning waves slapped foamingly across the slanting deck the challenge to orderly work was obvious. He therefore, in a regular quarterdeck talk to the men, demanded their obedience and good conduct, concluding with the announcement that that alone ever insured harmony to a pirate ship—an equal division of the spoils to all, with a double share to the ship; that is, the captain.

Next he sent a deputation with drawn cutlases to hunt out the fugitives and bring them before him under the persuasion of peaceful treatment. Out of their refuges came the frightened and tousled seamen, doubtless full dubious of the efficacy of the promise of him whom they now regarded as a monster. Lining them up, he thus addressed them:

"Men, the inhumanity of the captain, of which you as well as we have complained, produced the consequences of last night. We are now going on a cruise. You may join with us, and if anything good comes to us you shall have your equal share. All I require is obedience and good order. You

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who have not been in this conspiracy have nothing to fear from us; do your duty as seamen and you will be well paid."

Four of the twelve grinned and stepped over to the ranks of the mutineers; eight stood dumb, answering never a word. It took a great deal of moral courage to stand amid those eight, deprived of even their dirks and utterly helpless in the hands of a crowd capable of the horrors which the eight had witnessed.

In the story of the sea, the bravery of naval battle, the courageous deportment of men on sinking ships, the unselfish giving of one's life for another, all these have been properly remembered with all the glowing artifice of rhetoric, and the heroes' names treasured in the marine annals of their country. Unhonored and unsung, for the most part, are those obscure sailors who, without the incitement of martial camaraderie, without the applause of onlookers, without expectation of fame, in the most dejected and hopeless of situations, have manfully stood by their notion of conscientious duty against their mutinuous or piratical fellows. Nevertheless these unknown ones ascended the very height of true heroism.

Conduct of this kind brands as a lie the cynical saying that "every man has his price," for some men will not accept life itself in payment for principle.

Quelch, the Boston pirate, had his sturdy protestants; so too did Major Bonnet, colleague of the infamous Blackbeard, and so did many other sea rogues. In truth, almost every instance of the sort exhibits the moral hardihood of an incorruptible minority.

John Gow's eight were delivered over to the rough abuse of Lieutenant Williams, who flogged them at will and set men to keep them at work at the point of the cutlas. On them fell all the hard labor of the ship, and they became the drudges of whatever roistering rascal chose to command them.

At the same time there is a final leniency about Gow's treatment of this minority which lifts him from the charge of entirely purposeless ferocity. Purposeless ferocity is a tradition of piracy; but a curious thing is that not one of the pirates, of the major type, whose crimes were afterward subjected to judicial examination, is particularly marked with a simple lust of cruelty.

Tales of brutality abound concerning ruffians like Lafitte, England, Low, Lewis, Rackam and the rest of the roguish gallery, which may or may not be true. The same stories circulated about Kidd, Quelch, Avery and Gow; but when compared with the judicial records, the source alone of this series of pirate tales of the activities of these last-named men, merely wanton cruelty is notably missing. On the contrary, in not a few cases there is a surprizing magnanimity manifested by men of undoubtedly criminal disposition.

Lives were taken in the actual capture of ships, but when the pirates gained possession there is no judicial record of plank-walking or other inhuman treatment. More often than not, the pirate chief recruited new hands from among the captives, though apparently without compulsion, and those who refused to join the black flag were commonly allowed to return to their ship and go their way.

Plunder was the chief quest of the pirates; and, that obtained, their interest in ships or men ceased. If the pirate coveted the ship for his own use, he generally disposed of its crew by signing on those who would and putting ashore those who would not.

Not that he was a tender chap—he could be very frightful where he conceived his profit required violence; merely sportive torture was not a characteristic of those remembered in the only authentic sources of the subject—the printed trials of the pirates. If this is true of those of whom we have definite information, it follows that the sanguinary accounts of those who never came to trial must be considerably thinned out by doubt.

Gow in his method followed the invariable practise of piracy—he stole his ship. They all began that way. In all the judicial reports of piracy we have examined only Major Stede Bonnet bought and outfitted a vessel for what was then called "the grand account." In two cases that we know of the disaffection of the crews made possible their corruption. Henry Avery, mate of the *Charles the Second*, capitalized the discontent of the men at not receiving their pay from the Spanish Government; and as Gow in his quarterdeck speech declared, short rations and harsh treatment combined to drive the crew of the *George* into mutiny. Probably neither the captain of the *Charles the Second* nor the *George* was individually responsible for the condition; they were themselves creatures of circumstance, but as representatives of the owners or charterers

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they became the tangible objects of undiscriminating violence.

The men who managed mutinuous plots such as these were much more shrewd in their selection of conspirators than were the men who attempted the great political plots of history, for the sea plotters seldom or never had a betrayal. They never approached the entire crew, but picked out a positive core, who would hold fast, seize ship and weapons and dominate the situation.

Perhaps this resolute conduct rose from the personal sense of wrong under which the individual plotter suffered—self-interest only could have produced so tight an adhesion to the group. The first part of the game called for few rather than many men, and apparently Gow could have persuaded four more men to come in with him than he actually did.

Properly the matter was a mutiny; but its development into piracy was inevitable, foreseen and provided for. In their position they might as well hang for a sheep as a lamb.

Another typically piratical trick followed—they painted out *George* and substituted for it the name *Revenge*, of all ship's names the best beloved of pirates.

The sailmaker hemmed up a strip of black bunting, and under the funereal ensign they turned their prow to the affronted sea.

LIVING at the unregulated rate they were, the meager provisioning of the ship was soon used up, and so, in search of food and wine rather than diamonds and gold, they set for the coasts of Spain and Portugal, hoping to intercept a local trader freighted with the desired goods.

A small English ship, the *Sarah Snow*, of Bristol, was the first honest craft vividly to discover that a robber was loose on the high seas. What with surprize and the display of a number of guns which Gow had brought up from below and thrust impressively through his ports, the *Sarah Snow* yielded without a fight, whereupon she was systematically rifled, from cargo to the crew's few shillings, and, leaving one volunteer to join the despoilers, she was permitted to proceed on her voyage.

The *Delight*, of Poole, next fell into their hands in very similar circumstances—was plundered and allowed to go.

An Englishman, carrying fish from Newfoundland to Cadiz, was informally and unexpectedly relieved of a large portion of his cargo without dockage or stevedoring fees, but unfortunately without any receipt being given him for the information of his owners. Not only that, but somebody thoughtfully decided the owners might at least have the advantage of the insurance, so he kicked a hole in the bottom and the fish-boat took a nose dive into the far green deeps.

The captain and her crew of four men were brought aboard the *Revenge* as "prisoners." They were kept forward under guard, for what eventual disposition nobody—least of all themselves—had the slightest notion.

Lieutenant Williams beguiled a boresome day by hanging them up by the thumbs or seeing which one could longest stand a rope's end on his bare back. Williams doubtless would have delighted in the plank-walking trick, but public opinion was not entirely with him. In fact he began to sneer at Gow—behind his back—for a chicken-livered pirate, and even secured a sort of following for his point of view.

One of the four captives, a man named Jack Belvin, avoided the Welsh lieutenant's flayings by signing on with the pirates; the others heroically endured rather than become felons. Well, they must have been pretty good men to begin with to take a boat requiring only a crew of five all the way from Newfoundland to Cadiz.

A Scotch ship, carrying pickled herrings to Italy, was the next in line. The *Revenge* already had a surplus of fish, so Gow amused the men and practised the gunner by bombarding her with his guns and thus amusingly sending the pickled herring back to their original element. The Scotch crew joined Williams' victims forward.

A pirate always overloaded on the products of the locality he haunted. Kidd, off the Malabar coast, procured butter enough to use as a lubricant; Quelch, down Brazil way, acquired control of the coffee and sugar trade; Blackbeard and Bonnet, off the Carolinas, specialized in pineapples and Jamaica rum; Henry Avery, in the Gulf of Guinea, opened his prize package and found it full of negro slaves; and now here is John Gow seriously disturbing the market in salt and pickled fish. Save for the exceptional chance, Kidd, Quelch and Avery would have degenerated into petty pedlers of stolen groceries—their big hauls just happened along.

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Everybody on board was now living on salmon, cod and pickled herrings, with never a barrel of bread to go with the fish, and not a spoonful of wine to wash the thirst-provoking diet down. They hesitated to attack any new ships for fear another scaly cargo should mock them odoriferously from the hold—the thing got beyond a joke, and the cook no doubt kept his dirk handily under his apron as he passed out the inevitable hunk of pickled horror.

Gow had already seen vividly that the matter of something to eat will upset a dynasty and junk a throne more quickly than any merely political irritation, so, for the appeasement of his subjects and the preservation of his dignities—to say nothing of his life—he resolved to risk no more disappointing ships but to strike for a port and the run of land stores.

The place chosen for their custom was the little Portuguese settlement of Porta Santa, in the Madeiras. With something of the feeling that honester men have on the homeward heave all hands pulled together heartily, nor allowed any wallowing merchantman to divert them until the white walls and red roofs of their desired haven rose comfortingly out of the sea. The *Revenge* foamed smartly into the harbor and rattled her anchor into the mud.

A solemn council in the great cabin—now in all that queer topsyturvydom which betrays apparent but false authority, and where there was no longer any cramping posture for evening prayers—decided that here was a splendid opportunity to get rid of some of their fish. Appropriately they would bestow a quantity of it on the governor of Porta Santa as the embodiment of the State.

Half a dozen ruffians washed their faces, clubbed their briny locks, rubbed up their shoe-buckles, pulled together with long stitches the gaping holes in their stockings and set out in a boat jammed with dried salmon and pickled herring.

From his airy prison the Scotch captain gazed pensively upon them.

"Mon," he groaned to a captive Dane, "I cuid bear to ken the rabbers sell ma fush—but to gi'e it awa'; gi'e it awa' to these jabberin' jumping-jacks for never a bawbee! Mon, mon, these mock sailors air on the road to ruin. And Gow a Scottish man!"

John Gow's departure from the normal was simply inexplicable.

The burly Dane grunted, "Yah," practically the extent of his linguistic resources in Danish or any other tongue. He never did know what all these doings meant anyway.

His Excellency was deeply touched when the load of preserved marine fauna was dumped on the gubernatorial veranda.

"It's not so much the gift," he reflected, turning over a stark salmon with the toe of his shoe, "as the spirit of the giver."

He looked approvingly on the six honest visages before him and marveled at the depths of their unselfishness.

"Where are you bound?" he asked in Portuguese.

"Tell him Bristol, Bill," prompted one of the emissaries to the slow-footed chum who could parley the lingo sufficiently to interpret the question to his fellows.

So Bristol it was.

With racial courtesy the governor proposed to return to the ship with them, formally to thank their captain. A group of local dignitaries was quickly collected, and all went down to the wharf.

"The governor's coming aboard," shouted Gow as the company appeared at the waterside. "Now, men, keep 'em on the quarterdeck and away from the prisoners, and you yourselves try to look less like jailbirds and more like sailormen!"

The reception on the quarterdeck left nothing out; even the awning was drawn across so that for a little while it seemed to some of the men that the past few weeks were all a dream, good or bad as the individual viewpoint dictated.

The boat had had orders, after bringing out the governor's party, to go back to town and fetch provisions. Now whether the idea was to pay for the goods or just to take them with a thank-ye-marm is not a matter of recorded history; historical it is, however, that the boat came back empty, which Gow noticed out of the corner of his eye. Excusing his absence, he stepped down the companion-ladder in anxious questioning. Somehow there was always drumming through his head old Paterson's ancient chant—

"As we eat, so shall we work."

"They won't give us the grub," bellowed the boatswain, balancing himself in the stern of the bobbing boat.

Gow went back and lodged a courteous complaint with his Excellency. Excellency called an attendant and battered him about

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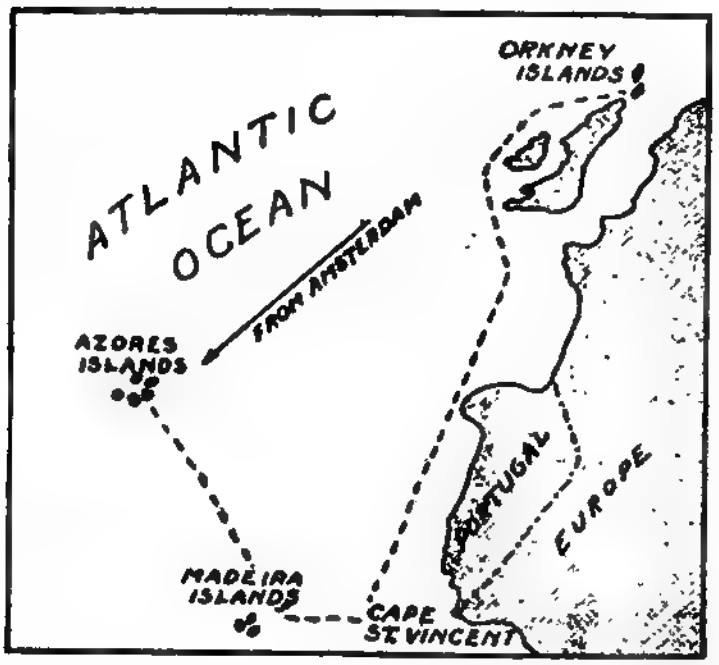
the ears with swift Portuguese. Attendant went back with the boat.

Back came the boat in a little while with the boatswain holding aloft a sadly small meal-bag in signals that needed no aid from the boatswain's disgusted expression. More complaints to the governor—and complaints rather acrid; more rapid-fire at the attendant; another departure for shore—the boat's crew were beginning to grumble at their oars—another return. Nothing at all



with them this time. The boatswain wig-wagged Gow to do something violent with the governor.

Which Gow proceeded to do. He unbuttoned his coat and revealed himself attired to play "Arsenal" in a charade, with a belt full of sudden death in several varieties. As calmly as if he were taking out a toothpick, he drew a long, convincing pistol and laid it cozily, nose on, into the deepest crease of the governor's brocaded waistcoat.

In this manner the *Revenge* was amply provisioned at Porta Santa.

THE larder stuffed, the next question before the house was whither now. "Before the house" is a calculated phrase, for by approved piratical procedure equal franchise prevailed on the *Revenge*—a majority decided all general propositions; only in the particular ones of fighting, chasing or being chased was the captain's power absolute.

With their odd turn for the comic the jolly sea robbers would often describe their conferences as sessions of the "House of Lords" or the "House of Commons," just as they enjoyed, when carousing ashore under the mangrove-trees of the West Indies, holding mock courts for the mimic trial of one of their number for piracy, when the "judge" would throw a tarpaulin around his shoulders for the judicial robe, and a turban on his head for the ponderous judicial wig, and the whole affair would be carried off in a quite striking parody of that judical process which many of their fellows had already suffered under, and for most of whom the actual fact was but a question of time. Such jollities revealed an intimate knowledge of forms and manner and curiously reflected the contemporaneous severity of prosecutors and judges.

The lawless business still had its laws; for instance, sea courtesy between passing pirates required salutes with loaded guns as against the usual blanks, and in their burial rites the maritime rovers often followed their own peculiar but very particular ritual.

After the usual tumultuous debate Cape St. Vincent, Portugal, was the place chosen for their happy efforts, there to intercept the lawful merchants in those fairly crowded sea lanes. The selection looked justified by an early capture. But—alas for the disappointments of life!—when the cargo was eagerly examined it was found to be merely a mass of negro slaves being rushed from the Gulf of Guinea to the American plantations by way of Lisbon, into which the slaver had had to detour through the pressure of adverse circumstance.

Little did John Gow realize as he looked down into that fetid hold that he was gazing upon one of the major elements of future history and the strife of armed hosts. Probably he would not have cared at that.

Slaves were less desirable even than salt fish—Gow wanted no more mouths to feed. However, he could replenish his sail lockers from the brig's canvas, as well as obtain a bag full of watches, small coins and personal knickknacks from the crew.

Then too the gang decided that here was a good chance to be rid of a number of their unprofitable prisoners by a means not too violent. The prisoners of a pirate were a constant problem throughout the history of the business, because, contrary to the common idea, very few pirates could bring themselves to an utter ferocity in the destruction of their victims after the guns had ceased throbbing and the smoke had curled away from the desecrated waters.

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The worst of them—Teach, England, Davis, Low, Lewis—all had their hours of compunction, and marooning was hit upon not as a method of wicked torture, but as a compromise to get men out of the way whom they could not feed and who would not work with them, yet without making the ship a shambles. This appears to be true at least of English-speaking pirates; when you come to the swart Ladrone villains, many of the Spanish and the Chinese, there you will find the uttermost of barbarity.

So a group of the forlorn mariners was transferred from the *Revenge* to the slaver—not at the slaver's request—and that vessel was then allowed to proceed on its humane occasions.

Lieutenant Williams could not get the point of all this solicitude for mere prisoners. He rather favored the Chinese way.

A French ship next splashed around the cape and into captivity. A neat find, being freighted with goodly store of oil and wine, even to the solid value of five hundred golden English pounds. Captured, too, like the rest of them, without a blow.

As a matter of fact, a fight was exceptional rather than usual, not because merchant masters were cowardly, but because the pirate, often by a trick of false colors, gained a confiding approach until within close range, when he would suddenly bristle his line of muzzle-framing open ports with the snarling demand of money or life. As the old West would have put it, the pirate "got the drop" on his prey.

The dour old Scotch captain, still lamenting the waste of his "fush," now met the wheel of fortune on one of its most whimsical turns. The *Revenge* was a little bored with the Scotch friend, and a quarterdeck parliament hit on the artful idea of simply making an entire change of prisoners by bodily shifting the present ones over to the Frenchman and bringing all the Frenchmen to the *Revenge*. The pirates felt so relieved with the newness of it all that they even gave the puzzled Scot additional sails and some small articles of ship furniture—only Mr. Williams reserved the right to kick his departing victims down the gangway. A really nasty person was Williams.

It would be mightily entertaining, no doubt, to know what the feelings of the Scotch skipper were as he found himself thus on another man's quarterdeck, in another man's cabin, going through another man's shipping papers and deeply mystified as to how he was going to explain the extraordinary situation to another man's owners.

We wonder, too, what the French owners said when their ship finally reported in the person of a master with an outlandish tongue and a truly incredible yarn.

The Scot bobbed away to the horizon, cogitating his own particular problems, when another ship—but of the wrong sort—came smoothly down upon the *Revenge*.

A French warrior!

Gow took her in with a long, slow glass.

"Thirty-two guns," he growled to his boatswain, "and by the looks of her decks the whole French Navy's aboard!"

Down fluttered the black flag; a young panic brewed in these honest hearts, while in the prisoners' quarters the Frenchmen could scarcely breathe for hope and fear.

Gow knocked his pipe pensively out on the capstan. His was the right of decision to stay and fight or flee to fight another day.

He ordered flight.

"You white-livered coward!" bellowed Williams, rather grogged up. "Run away from a frog-eater!"

That meant only one thing—who could fire first? Out of his belt Williams whipped his pistol and snapped it squarely at his captain. The thing flared and fizzed and flashed feebly in the pan. Guns were tragically unreliable in those days. Ere he could recover for another shot, he went down with two balls piercing his body—and one of them was from the weapon of old Paterson.

Gow simply commanded with a slight, contemptuous inclination of the head; old Paterson and another grabbed the lieutenant for rough-and-ready interment in the convenient deep, but when they had pantingly hoisted the body to the height of the bulwark, it came back to vigorous life, hit about with startling force and then bolted, pistol drawn and still loaded, to the powder-magazine, shouting that all hands should go down—or rather up—together. Within but a second of the most dreadful destruction, a couple of stalwarts fell heavily on the desperate wretch and lugged him away to be chained in irons and cast among the prisoners, there to be nursed lovingly and tenderly by those who, like all previous captives, had endured his vile whims; nursed, that is, by being used as a bench for

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tired Frenchmen to sit upon, and as a football for those whose cramped limbs made wholesome exercise imperative.

Somehow the rogue lived—lived until another ship was captured, or more probably simply detained; for after appropriating a few portable valuables Gow, with the consent of the crew of the *Revenge*, put Lieutenant Williams aboard the stranger with sharp admonition to the surprized skipper to keep him in close ward until the first English man-of-war was met, to which he was to be delivered as a wicked pirate for yard-arm bunting.

Simply speechless with astonished rage, Mr. Williams was slung aboard.

But he was only one of many who had to learn that above all things pirates loved their little jokes—especially some delicate impertinence like this to constituted authority.

THE ship seemed awfully quiet after the roaring Williams had gone. Something was missing, but what it was they did not just know. Unsuspectingly the grim jest of sending Williams home to the gallows had removed the heart of the piratical enterprise. If the *Revenge* expected to keep on the grand account fellows like Williams who could do the rough work were essential, and without him the great affair threatened to simmer back to the status of a mere mutiny.

Then too the presence of the war-ship with its promise of hundreds of pounds of hot lead and forest of cutlases, awakened unhappy perturbation and stirred even sluggish imaginations with pictures of uncomfortable events. The lads pensively stared at their finger-nails and realized only one insistent fact—that they must depart the region forthwith.

Some kind of retreat began to be openly proposed, but just whither? That was the vexing thing. At this point John Gow forfeits a place in the first rank of pirates, for he shows that he did not know the fine points of the game.

He is now not far from the place where Henry Avery some years before had stolen the *Charles the Second*, a ship on which he was mate, and with his exploiting of a discontented crew was in circumstances very similar to those now surrounding Gow. Avery, it may be remembered, came first of all to the Madeiras, but the point of separation between him and Gow is that Avery knew that the local coast was not the most advantageous place for piracy, knew that the jeweled Indies was, and set his unswerving prow resolutely thither.

A moment's thought concerning the conditions of piracy suggests Gow's difficulty. A pirate's main resource was in merchant cargoes; only luck threw him the fabled treasure-ships. For all he could tell about, a pirate might have to plug along in a quiet way of trade, hoping for the time when a *Quedagh Merchant* or a *Gunsway* would reward his patient application.

But the successful raiding of merchant ships put the pirate in the same situation that the honest shore trader was in—to make any profit at all he had to keep his stock turned over. Now in the Indies while a pirate was waiting his big haul a system of coast "fences," or buyers of stolen freight, made possible his continuance in business. Kidd and Avery and all the rest of them used these folk for the disposal of their plunder, for as we have seen one of these gentlemen, Cogi Commodo, boasted to the steward of poor Captain Green's ill-fortuned ship that he had been "merchant," on the Malabar coast, to the eminent Kidd.

These illicit traffickers supplied the interlopers and other competitors of the British East India Company as well as catering to the native markets. The arrangement suited everybody except John Company.

But in European waters the only possible opening for a pirate's wares—that is, of the usual merchant sort—was in methods akin to smuggling. That, however, was already a complicated and preempted business, and in taking any ship it would always be questionable whether her freight was dutiable and therefore worthwhile contraband. Smuggling could never flourish so haphazardly.

Last of all, but sufficiently troublesome, was the stricter policing of the European coasts. Without these guardians, of course, the customs would have entirely collapsed and piracy rather than smuggling would have prospered by maintaining a sort of cheap local bazaar, such as Blackbeard did in the Carolinas. The lack of effective policing made possible the brisk trip of John Quelch, the Boston boy, down the Brazil coast, for a cargo taken in one latitude was auctioned off in another, and no "fence" was needed to aid in dodging a vigilant authority.

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The *Revenge* thus was driven off the coasts of Spain and Portugal by lack of a market and incidentally by the police patrol.

Gow and his crew turned the matter over and over in a long debate, which resulted in a determination to sail away to Gow's native Orkney Islands, a decision which can be laid only to the peculiar fatality which seems to work the self-destruction of wickedness.

The meeting must have discussed the possibilities of the East and West Indies, Madagascar, Africa and the Red Sea, not to mention a flyer in slaving on the Guinea Coast; in other words all the available opportunities for a rising young pirate. But why, against these, were chosen the lean and foggy Orkneys, where even the poor copper penny was worked to death, is a puzzler.

Could it be that pirates sometimes grew homesick?

They hauled down the black flag and shoved it in the locker, whence it was never withdrawn to flap its sinister warning in the winds, and proceeded to give their gang of perplexed French prisoners a trip to Scotland. It would not be surprizing if those victims of sportive destiny were beginning to get all turned around, as the saying is.

Without "being chased or giving chase" they reached the northern islands, and Gow, perhaps with a constricted throat and a wet eye, looked once again upon his native land. As they drew into the bay Gow called his flock together and instructed them to retail to any curious inhabitant the plausible fiction that the *Revenge* was bound from Cadiz to Stockholm, "but contrary winds driving them past the sound till it was filled with ice, they were under the necessity of putting in to clean their ship, and that they would pay ready money for such articles as they stood in need of." Of course, they were to leave undisturbed the assumption that they were the actual as well as ostensible owners of the aforesaid "ready money."

One other craft was in the bay when the *Revenge* put in, but to Gow's relief she turned out to be only a French smuggler, or rather a smuggler belonging to the Isle of Man, laden with wine and brandy from France, which had come north about to "steer clear of the custom-house cutters."

According to the amenities of the sea, Gow exchanged presents with the smuggler, as he did also with a Swedish ship which came in a couple of days later. The Swede and the Manxman marveled greatly at the generous gifts of dried salmon and pickled herring which this hospitable *Revenge* almost thrust upon them.

HIS name might as well be put as Jemmy; for Jemmy has an honest sound, and this Jemmy was an honest lad. What his parish parson actually did christen him is irrevocably lost in some ancient parish record, but somehow it seems as if he should have been named Jemmy, and we will take the liberty of assuming that for once fact and fiction are coincident.

Jemmy, presumably again, was one of the stubborn eight who had refused at the time of the mutiny to be traitors to their sailor's duty; at any rate he had no stomach for a pirate's perils and pleasures. Also he was a clear-minded youth, old enough, however, to see that his company had now brought him within hailing distance of the King's gallows.

Jemmy had no appetite for the ceremonial that that instrument adorned, and so in the late Spring night when the moon was dark and the moment persuasive Jemmy slid whitely off the stern of the *Revenge* without stopping to procure his honorable discharge as an able seaman, and with no more of a flop than a frog would make turning off a log. With his clothes tightly tarpaulined about him he clove the circling tides smoothly to the beach.

As he pulled on his breeches and stockings he looked back, but all was quiet. One small yellow light rose and fell out yonder in the watery blackness; to Jemmy the eye of an evil beast of the sea from whose maw he panted in a buoyant freedom.

He listened; there was no chump of oars, no hoarse calling afar off, only the wash of white waters among the pebbles at his feet and behind him voices of the shore—the sweet, sane sounds of a life which he had begun to think had never been.

Dressed, he made for the village. In the middle of an unlighted roadway a strangely accented tongue told him there was no magistrate there; to find his honor one would have to push on to Kirkwall.

And how far was Kirkwall?

Kirkwall was a matter of four leagues.

"I must get there tonight," said Jemmy. "Which is the way?"

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"The nicht!" came back the buzzed bewilderment. "To the magistrate at Kirkwa' the nicht? Mon, what's upon ye?"

Jemmy wished the fellow would not talk so loud, though reason told him lungs of brass would hardly reach the *Revenge*. Panic.

"Do you know any one would show a man the way to Kirkwall for a bit of money?" Jemmy, inspired.

The void answered not. Then ponderously—

"It would take a muckle o' siller for a man wi' bairns to go out the nicht."

"A half-guinea, supposin'."

Long pause.

"Aye—supposin' as ye say. Cam, lad."

Jemmy's guide stopped a little while at a cottage to warn the guid wife he would be out making an honest penny, and then they were off on the shadowy leagues. Cicerone tried with rude probe to find out what Jemmy's business with the magistrate might be, a fact which perhaps as much as the coveted "siller" had bought his services; but when daylight and Kirkwall appeared together he left his queer employer at the house of the magistrate with all of his information unbroached.

"This is a funny cock to be crowing in my parlor the morn," thought the magistrate as with sleepy peevishness he was compelled to journey to Santa Cruz, to provision at Porta Santa, to double Cape St. Vincent and what not by this boy with early manhood's whiskers unshaven, drawn, sallow face, uncurbed hair and clad in a striking symphony of old sea-clothes. "But sairtainly there has been an egg laid somewhere."

He sent for Mr. Honeyman, sheriff of the county, who dwelt between Kirkwall and the sea. After due deliberation, consultation and speculation he issued his precepts to the constables and other peace officers to call together the people "to assist in bringing those villains to justice." Raised his posse, in plain Latin.

While these matters transpired at Kirkwall, other things significant for Gow were occurring on the *Revenge*, or rather off it, for the defection of Jemmy was followed by a veritable landslide—ten men, no less, seized the longboat and made off for the mainland, where they coasted along till they came to Leith, the port of Edinburgh. Their hard journey was rewarded by imprisonment in the Tolbooth at that place as suspected pirates. A well-founded suspicion if there ever was one.

When John Gow took the next census of his crew only twenty-eight honest fellows answered, "Here." Although it was obviously time to move on to uncropped pasturage, Gow first resolved to provision himself at the expense of the home folks by the violent means of robbing the wealthier residents alongshore. With that marked turn of his for a quaint joke, the first place that he selected for despoiling was that of our Mr. Honeyman, high sheriff.

Ten men in charge of the bosun were detached for this job, and, slinging upon their persons everything in the way of a weapon they could struggle along with, they started off in the early evening.

The high sheriff was flying about the country, compelling his posse; and it was Mrs. Honeyman, candle in hand, who answered the gently deceptive tapping on her front door. When she saw the bristling aggregation on the front steps she thought for an instant that it was a party of neighbors stopping in on their way to a fancy-dress ball to show her their diverting make-up. Or she may have mistaken them for a part of her husband's posse, and may have been about to assure them laughingly that they had made the funniest mistake in the world when one of the great beards cracked like a young earthquake and a gale-conquering noise boomed through the ancestral halls of the Honeymans.

"Excuse us, marm, yer leddyship, but we're the pirates and we've come to rob the house. Gi' us the stuff and there'll be no trouble."

Nine walking arsenals clanked into the house, while one remained on guard at the door. The good wife screamed and fled, but fled methodically to the place where the family treasure was secreted; and, throwing the money into an apron, she ran back and out past the sentinel. He supposed she was merely running for her life, and he did not blame her a bit, though that was as far as his interest went.

But up-stairs she left her greatest valuable—a lovely daughter, just blooming, as the romancers say, into beautiful womanhood. This young person's sleep was interrupted by an inexplicable clamor below.

She got out of bed, threw something about her and crept out on the stair landing. Unfamiliar voices surged up, together with a

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cracking and splintering that suggested an escaped menagerie.

She inherited her mother's presence of mind. Dashing into father's bedroom, she grabbed the family papers, and with them in tight grasp she leaped from her bedroom window, to speed ghostily into the dark.

The two female servants and Sandy, the groom, cowered in the kitchen. The marauders found them there; politely they bowed to the ladies, but demanded of Sandy whether he could play the bag-pipes. Sandy admitted his skill on that instrument of torture. So they lugged him out by the ear and bade him pipe them down to their ship, while they followed behind with all the Honeyman plate and linen bundled up in bed-sheets on their backs, and all the good Honeyman wine, accumulated through the thrifty years, kicking a jig out of their ruffianly heels.

Sandy's wild night is doubtless still a story in Sandy's generations.

WITH the loot of the sheriff's house on board, the *Revenge* dropped down the coast a way for another job of "provisioning." They made a fruitless attempt there, and then drew over to an island known as Calf Sound, where was the home of a Mr. Fea, an old schoolmate of John Gow. The pirate felt he could not leave those parts without saying how-do to one who in the past had shared with him the same dominie's birch.

In getting to the island, however, Gow dropped his anchor too close inshore, so that when it came time to shift he would not be able to avail himself of the wind. Too much wine from the Honeyman cellars probably.

So the pirate chief wrote a little friendly note to Mr. Fea, begging the loan of a boat to assist in heaving off the ship by carrying out an anchor, and promising solemnly that the favor would not be rewarded with any violence to Mr. Fea's boat or servants. This last clause suggests that Gow knew the word of warning against him was spread abroad over the land.

The bewhiskered messenger who made the contact with Mr. Fea did not notice Fea's boat, which happened to have been drawn up on the beach out of sight behind some rocks. Mr. Fea took advantage of the messenger's oversight and returned to his old chum Jack a very vague answer, the purport of which was that Mr. Fea deplored his inability to oblige. By that time evening was at hand, and Mr. Fea ordered his servants to run the boat into the water, sink her in the shallows whence she could be readily recovered and secrete her gear.

Jock and Tam and Donald were hastily pulling out the mast and rolling up the canvas and unshipping the rigging when they heard the grate of a keel on the sharp pebbles, from which, by the passing of a scud of thin cloud from before the moon, they saw five men slide quietly out—not so quietly, however, that the variety of weapons on shoulders and belts did not slightly jingle. The three servants peered breathlessly over the rocks and marked the movements of the invaders as they set off directly for Mr. Fea's house.

Quickly they threw the boat's trappings beneath a boulder, thrust the boat itself nose down into the water, where she quickly filled and settled, then turned and ran for the house, where they arrived shortly before the pirates who were approaching, stumbling and swearing, through the unfamiliar dark.

Mr. Fea ordered all of his servants to leave the house, but to remain in the vicinity; and if he should come out one or two of them were to follow him at a discreet distance. Alone he prepared to answer the thundering banging upon his front door.

Calmly, quite without panic, Mr. Fea invited the delegation into the hall. They came and peered cautiously about. There was no sight or sound of any one but the master of the house; only the candles burned in their long silver sticks, and a fire against the raw Spring night smoked on the wide hearth.

"There is no one here, my friends," said Mr. Fea. "May I ask——"

"You may," growled the bosun, thumping his musket-butt on the polished floor. "We want your boat to pull us off—we've got out of the wind, d'ye mind? Cap'n says give us the boat and we'll leave yer joolry."

"Jack Gow could have anything he wanted from an old schoolmate," smiled Mr. Fea, like one who, in a pinch, would not object to being a pirate himself; "but Jack is asking a little too much, when you come to think of it. Here is Jack—a good boy, too, even if he was a little rough at school—come back to his old home only to

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be published a pirate, but, says I when I heard this—

" 'Little Johnny Gow a pirate?'

" 'Never in this world,' said I, and many on the sound can bear me out on this.

" 'But he is,' said they, and a bad, pillaging, plundering sea-dog he is, to be sure.

" 'Well,' said I, 'you are welcome to the notion, but as for me I stand by little Johnny Gow.'

"But now, hark'ee, suppose I had a boat and suppose I said to Johnny Gow, 'Here, heave off with this boat,' what d'ye imagine would happen to me?

"Why, inside of no time at all I'd be fast in the Tolbooth at Edinburgh as an aider and abettor of pirates. As men of the world, you know you can't talk to some people when a notion's stuck in their heads, can ye now?"

In this way Mr. Fea turned the edge of the tense minute. With one pretext and another, he wooed the delegation down to the village tavern, where he opened wide his purse and they opened still more widely their mouths into which that liquid flowed which is authoritatively reputed to steal away the brains. The pirates mellowed, got to slapping Mr. Fea jolting whacks on the shoulder and constantly pledged him with their mugs.

Opportunely their host, so bland, so hospitable and—although they did not realize it—so sober, excused himself a second and, stepping out, called Tam and Donald quickly and bade them scamper to the beach and destroy the pirate's boat. This done, they were to come back to the tavern and send in some kind of casual word which would give him excuse to leave his company a second time.

As Mr. Fea passed into the public room again, the keeper and his wife met him with upraised hands and faces of silent consternation. He smiled reassuringly, pushed open the door, upon which a roar of strange sea songs came tumultuously from the inside accompanied with the clanging of cutlases marking time to the voices.

Very coolly he resumed his place at the presidency of the revels, where he directed the increasing bubble of strong Scotch whisky, varied with the husky smuggled French brandy, until to his obvious annoyance he was again interrupted by a call to the outside.

TAM and Donald had done their task. Pulling them aside from the yellow squares of light which shone from the boisterous inn, Mr. Fea now bade them assemble six men, well armed, place them behind the hedges and carefully remember to do one of two things—if Mr. Fea came from the tavern accompanied only by the boatswain, the ambush was to seize the boatswain; but if he came with the whole crew, he would walk a little forward of the company, upon whom the watchers were then to open fire.

After a considerable wait the tavern door opened and Mr. Fea stepped forth—and with him was only the boatswain. The boatswain wanted to take his host's arm in the most friendly manner, but Mr. Fea adroitly disentangled himself—it was no part of his plan to be thus cuddled.

Having no use for his rejected arm, the boatswain decided to carry a pistol in each hand, remarking that after all they were his best friends. Mr. Fea thought he was very careless in the way he swung the weapons around in gestures and for the purpose of punctuating his vigorous conversation.

At a dark and hedge-lined part of the road the boatswain was just indicating with a very free gesticulation how to repulse an enemy at one's bulwarks, when something—probably a heavenly meteor-struck him suddenly from behind, and down he went on the flat of his back, the pistols clattered from his hands, and the meteor, or whatever it was, was poking a handkerchief a whole lot farther down his throat than he thought necessary for the purpose of preventing speech. Before the fog from his brain could lift, he was bound hand and foot until he was as inert as an Egyptian mummy.

The attackers left one man to guard their first capture and stole back to the tavern for the big job. There were two doors to the room where Gow's men were having their little party. At each of these Mr. Fea placed a group of men, who at a signal broke in on both sides and covered the pirates with their muskets before the besieged could pull a dirk or raise a cutlas.

Law and order now had five out of twenty-eight men, but rather disappointly for our interest the record thus concludes—

At length, by an equal exertion of courage and artifice, Mr. Fea captured these dangerous men, twenty-eight in number, without a single man being

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killed or wounded; and only with the aid of a few countrymen.

And among the captives was old schoolmate John Gow.

Happily, for every Gow there is a Fea.

The *Revenge* was seized by the Government and the pirates were sent to Edinburgh under a military guard which came to Calf Sound for that purpose. At Edinburgh they were ironed aboard the frigate *Greyhound*, which brought them down to London and the court of admiralty which was waiting there to try them.

Five of them were admitted King's evidence, the rest were put to their plea. Now in the old law the prisoner's plea of guilty or not guilty was necessary before the trial could proceed. Nowadays if the accused refuses to make either plea, but stands mute as the expression is, the judge directs that a plea of not guilty be entered for him, and the proceedings go on.

This simple means of meeting the difficulty did not occur to our forefathers, so they decreed that if the prisoner stood mute he was to be put under the press until he either pleaded or died. In the latter event he was not considered to have been tried; and, not having been tried, any estate which he might leave could not be forfeited. History records some cases where extraordinary persons have endured this dreadful torment to the end and so saved their property to their heirs, who, one would suppose, could certainly never be sufficiently grateful.

John Gow now chose to take the ordeal rather than be convicted as a felon, for he had relatives whom he wished to inherit his ill-earned gains rather than King George. The preparations for his pressing daunted him. The process was that the person sentenced to be pressed was stretched, or spread-eagled, upon his back, and a succession of weights were gradually lowered upon his chest until he either squeaked his plea or perished. The Press-Yard of old Newgate jail indicates the place of such pressings.

Gow's nerve gave way and he begged to be allowed to plead, which was clemently allowed him.

He and six others—presumably including old Paterson—practically the original plotters were convicted and received sentence of death; but the rest, showing that their actions had been under a sort of compulsion, were acquitted. Says the old historian:

> They suffered at Execution-Dock, August 11, 1729. Gow's friends, anxious to put him out of pain, pulled his legs so forcibly that the rope broke, and he fell, on which he was again taken up to the gibbet, and when he was dead, was hung in chains on the banks of the Thames.

As the ordinary, or prison chaplain, rode back to Newgate in the empty cart from the dismal waterside suburb of Wapping, a little below which Execution Dock, the Admiralty's place of capital punishment, stood, a line from the ninety-second psalm persisted in his mind—

> All the workers of wickedness shall be destroyed.

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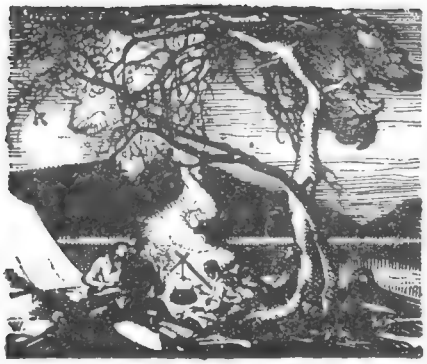

THE CAMP FIRE

A Meeting Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

A PLEA for snakes. I admit snakes have frequently been maligned by likening certain humans to them, but somehow it seems that if a snake isn't slimy he ought to be.

Brooklyn, New York.

What do you know about snakes? Snakes are adventurers in themselves, are they not? One always elaborates and embellishes an encounter with our ophidian friends, but how many of us know them—their habits and histories? Not many! To be brief, I've had a snake craze and I've read up on 'em and please let me say that in every book on "Snakology" it is emphatically denied that they are slimy. So—do not print it again. It may help the story—to color it a bit I mean—but it is not true. I grant you that their newly cast-off sloughs are sticky—but our graceful terrifying viper is not!

Thanking you from the corner of the Fire, I am—(MRS.) MARJORIE C. HIGGINS.

THE West is no more? Romaine H. Lowdermilk of our writer's brigade says it's still here:

Wickenburg, Arizona.

This clipping from the Prescott (Ariz.) *Courier* ought to prove to any man that the Dan'l Boones and Davy Crocketts are not all past and gone. Show it to those who howl that the West is no more.

Why, I can ride straight east or west from my ranch three days and never cross a fence and see but few habitations. I can show any man hundreds of miles of open country that won't average one person to each one hundred square miles!

Here is the clipping:

"Ben Lily certainly understands cat habits, according to a report sent out by the Coronado forest. He knows all the moves the felines are going to make; can think faster, and so he outwits them. He gets some dead and others living, but he gets them. The *Gila Bulletin* tells about some of his very practical exploits this past Winter, by reason of which the G. O. S. Cattle company has paid him $100 each for six of these marauders taken from the company's range. Mr. Lily recently captured three lion kittens, two of which he has sold for $200 apiece to an Oklahoma man who made a hunting trip on the Gila last Winter. Such men as Lily do a lot for the innocent wild life of the National Forest areas, as well as for the interests of livestock men who make it possible for them to work at the trade. Lily, however, isn't very romantic, for, according to an article by Frederic Winn in the March 4 New York *Herald*, he hasn't ever heard a lion utter "wild human screams." In fact, this slayer of big cats doesn't believe the lions ever do such things at all.

"Lily starts out, says Supervisor Wales of the Prescott forest, carrying only a little salt and corn meal, depending on the result of the hunt to feed himself and his dogs. Cat meat is not unpalatable, he says.

"In the Winter, Lily carries one blanket, not bothering with any bedding in the summer months. In defense of the dense growth of whiskers the lion hunter wears, Lily explained that they were a great protection."

That's Ben Lily! Could any of the old timers have started out with much less!

One blanket! A cowboy's bed-roll weighs about 70 lbs.—ROMAINE H. LOWDERMILK.

WE IN the office extend our sincere thanks for the response to our request for letters of criticism from those of our readers who are not in the habit of writing to any magazine. There was a veritable flood of letters, many of them the first letter the writer had ever sent to a magazine.

The value of this response is immense, for these are the readers concerning whom any editor must remain in the dark. He can not tell whether his magazine is pleasing them or displeasing them, for they say nothing. If his circulation rises or falls he

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knows it, but he can not always be sure of the cause or causes. In this case the response is doubly satisfactory, for we not only heard from the non-letter-writing part of our readers but their answers showed that they are satisfied. There were some criticisms (some of them needed) and many good suggestions, but the response as a whole was an emphatic O. K. on our magazine as it is.

Thanks, again. Now, when we record the likes and dislikes of those of you who do write in to us in the ordinary course of events, we have a fairly intelligent idea of the extent to which your letters represent the feeling of our readers as a whole. We never had before—it wasn't possible.

THIS out of a personal letter from Merlin Moore Taylor of our writers' brigade:

Chicago.

You might be interested in the fact that next year probably will see me with a government expedition which plans to go up the Fly River, along the Dutch New Guinea border, and cross former German New Guinea (now an Australian mandate) to the north coast. It's never been done before and it is hoped to connect with the famous Kukukuku savages, the terrors of the inland mountains and the only natives who travel at night. Some dozen or so were surprized several years ago by a patrol—and promptly fainted.—MERLIN MOORE TAYLOR.

THE most important coup in the history of our country. Hugh Pendexter tells us something of the situation in early Louisiana which led up to it, and which forms the background of his serial starting in this issue.

Norway, Maine.

Without room for expansion, as provided by the Mississippi basin, the English colonies in the New World were doomed to littleness. Without the Louisiana territory the new republic would have remained impotent and easily gobbled up by some European power when a time came that found a powerful foreign government at liberty to devote its entire attention to the assimilation.

FOR A hundred and fifty years before the coming of the first English colonists the French had held the St. Lawrence. From shortly before 1700 they had had full opportunity on the Mississippi. These two great waterways, with the Great Lakes, were of less importance to travel of the continent than were the Hudson, the Connecticut, the Susquehanna and Delaware Rivers, or were New York, Delaware and Chesapeake Bays. And this because France, England and Spain were sparring for permanent advantages in the New World. The English influence was penned up on a strip of coast some hundred and fifty miles wide, and up and down this coastal fringe the people moved from early 1600 until 1767 without attempting to penetrate the country beyond the western mountains.

FOR nearly a hundred and fifty years the settlers developed the hundred-and-fifty-mile-wide strip until their hamlets were cities, the connecting Indian trails were worn into roads, and yet remained in ignorance of what the land was just over the mountains. Dr. Thomas Walker, of Virginia, explored the headwaters of the Kentucky River and discovered Cumberland Gap in 1750. Christopher Gist was on the Scioto River in 1751. George Croghan went down the Ohio in 1765, and a year later James Smith visited what is now Tennessee and Kentucky.

THESE daring bits of individual travel enlightened the people of the sea-board practically none. To quote from Chief Justice John Marshall's speech on the conditions existing in 1767:

"The country beyond the Cumberland Mountain, still appeared to the dusky view of the generality of the people of Virginia, almost as obscure and doubtful, as America itself to the people of Europe, before the voyage of Columbus. A country there was—of this none could doubt, who thought at all; but whether land or water, mountain or plain, fertility or barrenness, preponderated—whether inhabited by men or beasts, or both, or neither, they knew not. If inhabited by men they were supposed to be Indians—for such had always infested the frontiers. And this had been a powerful reason for not exploring the region west of the great mountain, which concealed Kentucky from their sight."

Strong words and almost unbelieveable. It is believed that Boone began making hunting and exploring trips to the west as early as 1760. With the mystery of the land beyond the mountains unsolved one can appreciate how the unknown called to the famous pioneer. But it is not until 1769 that Boone's explorations become a part of history. In 1724 New England had for her western outpost Fort Dummer—Brattleboro, Vermont—and her next westward movement would be more than half a century later when her sons and daughters migrated to the Ohio lands.

The first settler in the valley of the Shenandoah is supposed to have been one named Morgan, a Welshman, who built a cabin beyond the Blue Ridge in 1726. Next in the valley was Joist Hite, of Pennsylvania, who settled near the site of modern Winchester in 1732. With this general ignorance of the country beyond the Appalachians it is not surprizing that the French had settlements among the Alabama Indians for ten years before the coast English suspected the fact.

DURING all these years France had an excellent opportunity to cement its hold on the Mississippi Valley. Pontchartrain, Crozat and the Company of the Indies, took their turn at exploiting the country. Unlike the English builder of homes, the French colonists entered the valley possessed of the most extravagant expectations. Gold and diamonds, mythical peoples living in Edens, filled their thoughts.

With all the advantage of their tremendous handicap over the English they lost the valley. Iberville's plea for colonizing the valley from the Lakes to the

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Gulf was unheeded. His younger brother, Bienville, pleaded in vain for colonists who would plant crops and make homes. France thought to fill her empty treasury much as Spain had done by conquering Peru.

I HAVE drawn on historical facts very liberally in attempting to show that the English were the myth-killers, and that their lack of gullibility paved the way to keep the great basin out of the permanent clutch of any power until the new republic was ripe to take it over, thus consummating the most important coup to be found in the entire history of our country.

The Natchez, so little known and understood, were not exterminated by the French, as it has often been claimed. But they were dispersed in 1735 as the result of the war waged against them in 1730 by French-Choctaw forces. They lived in the Cherokee country until 1800, when their warriors were estimated at fifty. And there was a time when they were a mighty people.

Among other authorities I am indebted to the following in building the story: Charles Gayarre's "Louisiana;" Albert Phelps' "Louisiana"; Dunbar's "History of Travel in America"; Winsor's, "Explorations in the Mississippi Basin"; "Historic Southern Cities," edited by L. P. Powell; "Mortuary Customs of the North American Indians," H. C. Yarrow; Hamilton's "Colonial Mobile"; John Fiske's "New France and New England."

IF FRANCE laid down trade-rules for the Gulf and river settlements which were hard to bear and often ignored, so did England rule that the West Indies sugar trade to her American colonies must pass through England's home ports so that the home merchants might get their rake-off. This rule was largely ignored by American merchants, and as a direct trade in beaver was forbidden, much clandestine trading over the mountains—rum for furs—was carried on. About 1730 to 1740 it is estimated according to Winsor that New England distilleries alone were consuming twenty thousand hogsheads of molasses in making rum, which, for a large part, was sent to Virginia and the Carolinas.

BIENVILLE'S dealing with the Natchez and other tribes was based on his inexorable rulings that "blood demanded blood," and the like. It is estimated by Henry W. Henshaw and Dr. John R. Swanton that when the French first visited the Natchez in 1682 they found a people numbering six thousand and capable of putting twelve hundred warriors into the field. The same authorities attribute to the Natchez an "extreme form of sun-worship and a highly developed ritual."

The Chickasaws differed but little from the Choctaws in customs and manner but were much more warlike, and impartially fought with the Shawnee, Choctaw, Cherokee, Creeks, Illinois, Osage, Kickapoo, Quapaw, and a few other tribes. Allied with the Cherokees in 1715, they drove the Shawnee from the Cumberland. Fifty-four years later they thoroughly whipped the Cherokee at Chickasaw Old Fields.

This ancient village was located in southeast Madison County, Alabama, on the north side of Tennessee River, opposite Chickasaw Island, and a few miles below Flint River.

They were friendly to the British and enemies to the French, defeating the French-Indian forces at Amalahta—northern Mississippi—in 1736, and again won out in 1739-40, when the French endeavored to remove them from the valley. The Hopewell treaty, 1786, fixing the northern boundary of the Chickasaw at the Ohio River, was their first dealings with the U. S. Government. A hundred years after the date of my story—1820—they were moving west of the Mississippi. One influence of the Spanish on the Chickasaws was the Ishpanee, or "Spanish" gens, from which must come the "mingos," or chiefs. Neither the Morgan nor Gibbs lists of gentes give the name used before the coming of the Spanish.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

IF YOU would like to have the original painting for a cover that may have pleased you we should be glad to have you bid upon it. No bid of less than ten dollars per cover considered. Send in your bid any time. Covers will be sent (express collect) to highest bidders about July first.

THERE was something in "A. A." back in the May 3, 1921, issue about the Lost Pegleg Mine to which Uncle Frank Huston took exception on a number of points. His letter only now comes out of our cache:

First, the Pegleg never was a mine. Barstown was not in existence 85 years ago. Every desert rat and prospector in the S.W. *knows* the general location of the "Pegleg"; again the low hill where quartz was found is in the Cuyamaca Mountains near Julian and was later located and became the famous "Stonewall Mine."

THE Pegleg nuggets were *not* sunburned, but "copper gold." Three different men stumbled on the deposit or pocket; first, Smith or Pegleg, then a discharged soldier from Fort Yuma, then an Indian, all of whom stumbled into White Water and thence to San Bernardino with specimens.

Harriman quotes me wrong twice. I lived at Thermal as you know and told him what is generally known to the real old-timers, some of whom, including myself have seen "specimens" of the three lots brought in, as did many others who visited the Pioneers' Building in S. F. before the earthquake. Then there is no authentic record of any persons losing their life hunting the Pegleg; hundreds have searched for it, but no lives, as far as I know, were ever lost in the search.

Three years ago the city marshal of ——, now ——, born and raised there over 60 years ago, told me he and another had located it, and it is only 60 to 75 miles from his birthplace, if that distant, but I notice he is quiet now about it.

Stand on the S. P. track at the station of Salton or that of Durmid 3 miles away, look straight across the Salton Sea to the mountains, between the sea and the foot-hills lies, in the sand-hills, what no real old-timer *ever* called a mine; but simply "The Pegleg" is the formula of the "old-timer."

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THERE is gold in those hills. The fathers at the San Diego Mission knew and handled it, before ever a "white" man entered the country. In the early 90's, when I lived on Cajon Mt., an Indian used to go in back and return with dust and nuggets. "Doc" Lyons, Cap. Freeman and others trailed him, but always he eluded them. Sure the lost "Padre or Mission Mine" (?) of Padre Barona. Even Tom Daily, who owned the Baronagrant, got the fever, and his native men were induced by him to prospect.

Barstow was built in the 80's as a division point on the Santa Fé line, the terminus to the Calif. So. Ry., Ntl. City of Bartow, where it joined the main system from Majore east.

One writer has this place confused with San Bardoon. Even on the State highway near Indian Wells the contour of the country changes with every wind and the Pegleg is not over fifty miles from there.

The so-called "mine" was a pocket or deposit undoubtedly and a few hundred dollars would cover the rake-off of all that the three discoverers brought away.

Mesquite Springs, for a while under Salton Sea, and where the duck hunters now congregate on the Browly road from Mecca, was the nearest known water-holes, in the adjacent hills. There is much detail space forbids my giving here, but you can get it by overhauling the files, if any left, of the San Bernardino papers of the 70's and 80's—UNCLE FRANK.

HERE'S one of our comrades stating, as an officer of the law on whom lies the task of apprehending criminals and keeping the peace, his views on the practical, common-sense side of the issues involved in the proposed national anti-weapon law.

It's all very well for the anti-weapon propagandists to theorize about noble results—that won't be attained, but here is something from one of the officers of the law who will be faced with the impossible duty of keeping peace if good citizens are disarmed and criminals disarmed only theoretically:

Prohibition of guns would be a tragedy. It seems to me that we have disarmed enough. For ——'s sake let us try to keep our population, our people, sufficiently familiar with weapons of war to protect the nation when the need arises, as well as themselves.

I am the supreme police officer of a county that is as big as several of the Eastern States, Connecticut, for one, and Switzerland. Myself and two deputies serve all the civil papers and preserve the peace in this territory. *But* we would be utterly helpless if it were not for the general run of the people, the sober, sedate law-abiding people *all* having two or three high-power rifles and a six-gun or two in the house all the time. The professional criminal knows that I can get out a posse any place in the county, any time, that is composed of individuals who can generally hit a coyote on the run at two-hundred yards, three shots out of five, and so they give us a wide berth and go to the cities where they receive the necessary police protection. A criminal without police protection is S. O. L. The police are not always to blame but any law *tending* to restrict the sale of firearms is to the benefit and advantage of the footpad and bandit. All the restriction we need is this; when a man has been convicted of a misdemeanor it shall be a misdemeanor for five years for him to have or possess concealable firearms. When he had been convicted of a felony it shall be a felony for life for him to have any kind of firearms in his possession. Make the ownership of a gun a standard of good citizenship. What do you think about it?— —— ——.

A TRAGEDY of nearly twenty years ago—a newspaper account sent in by one of us who was sheriff at the time and had noticed a mention of "Cowboy" Johnson in our pages. That's getting first-hand data all right:

Nogales, Arizona.

I picked up an old copy of your magazine (March 18, 1921) a few days ago and was interested in an article on page 179 in which "Cowboy Johnson" is mentioned. I was sheriff here at the time Johnson was killed and have never seen more blood from four men than that time.

Thinking the enclosed article, dated Jan. 28, 1905, may interest you and knowing the printed account is correct—I am, yours.—CHAS. L. FOWLER.

The worst shooting scrape that ever happened in Nogales and one of the most frightful in the history of Arizona occurred in the Palace Saloon here shortly after four o'clock yesterday morning resulting in the killing of M. M. Conn, proprietor of the Palace, J. J. ("Cowboy") Johnson a professional gambler, and Modesto Olivas, a Mexican monte dealer employed in that resort, by Fernando Walters, a California Mexican, who was also a gambler. The murderer then left the saloon going out into the street where he placed his deadly weapon to his forehead and put an end to his own earthly existence. The wholesale killing which was all over in about a minute's time was done with a .45 Colts revolver. The murderers' aim was perfect, all of his victims being shot through the brain as was also himself. All of the parties concerned lived for some time after the occurrence. About twenty-five persons witnessed the horrible deed.

THERE appears to have been no sufficient motive for the perpetration of such wholesale slaughter and it was probably done during a period of frenzied madness and mental depression. Walters was an extremely sensitive individual and appears to have made much of apparently trifling grievances.

He had been in Nogales, but a few weeks having, it is stated, come here at the request of "Cowboy" Johnson with whom he had been quite friendly elsewhere. He took an interest in the restaurant recently started in connection with the Palace saloon and had also been conducting the stud-poker game in that resort. A few days since, however, he had been detected in using some marked cards and Conn took the game away from him, granting the

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privilege to Johnson. The latter who had the reputation of being a great "josher" is reported to have bantered Walters a great deal over the manner in which the game was taken from him, and Walters being of such a sensitive makeup took offense thereat, telling him he had better discontinue his talk or there would be trouble. This circumstance appears to make up the only conceivable motive for the crime.

WALTERS went to the Monte Carlo saloon early Thursday evening and engaged in a game of stud-poker with several other men. He played in bad luck all night, losing nearly $100, and just before four o'clock Friday morning, he ceased playing and left the Monte Carlo, going directly to the Palace.

There are various conflicting statements as to the details of the occurrence, varying as to the sequence in which the three victims of the slayer met their fates, and from the statements taken by representatives of THE OASIS as given by a number of eye witnesses, the following is presented as probably an accurate description of what occurred:

Walters seated himself at one of the tables, and ordered a meal, which was served him and eaten. A ham sandwich, also ordered, he put into his pocket, where it was found after his death. Arising from his chair he stepped quickly up to Johnson, who was standing in front of the bar talking with ——— steel, drew his revolver from an inside pocket of the mackintosh he wore, fired with deadly aim at Johnson, the bullet entering the middle of the forehead immediately above the line of the eyebrows, and his victim fell in his tracks, but breathed some time before the vital spark fled. At the first shot Conn, who was seated in a chair, sprang to his feet and started for the door. Walters turned the next shot at him, the bullet striking his head just back of and above the ear, passing through the head, cutting a circular hole in the glass, crossing the street, passing through a show window at Escalada's and falling inside the store. Conn fell in the doorway, where he died shortly afterward. The murderer then turned his attention to George Spindle and fired point blank at him, at close range. Spindle put out his hand, turned the gun aside, and the bullet sped beyond him, hitting Olivas in the head, the bullet penetrating his brain, causing death some hours afterward. Spindle's face was slightly powder marked and his hat rim creased by the bullet. Stepping over the prostrate form of Conn the murderer walked out into the middle of the street, placed the muzzle of his smoking revolver to his own head, and with a single shot ended his earthly existence. He too manifested signs of life some time after the fatal bullet was sped on its fateful mission.

SHERIFF FOWLER was immediately notified. Justice of the Peace Grant being out of town, no inquest was held, there being no provision made in the statutes for such a contingency and the sheriff took charge of the affairs.

Johnson was well known throughout the Southwest and came here from El Paso some time since when prohibition of gambling in that city was made. He leaves a wife and daughter. His remains were shipped to El Paso this morning and the funeral will be held in that city by the Elks with which order he had been affiliated.

The line cities are very much wrought up over the tragedy and it is the sole topic of conversation among the citizens.

TO PRINT the whole of these two discussions (though one of them is not so long) would have given mighty interesting reading, but there wouldn't have been room for much of anything else in this "Camp-Fire" or the next one either. So here is only the transmitting letter from F. C. Robertson of our writers' brigade. It would be fairer to give Mr. Earnest and Mr. Sternberg full hearing, and a full hearing, too, to Mr. Robertson, but—how can I? And after all, among three men who know the West at first-hand there are bound to be many differences as to detail and variations due to local customs. Let's say they are all three right. I present Mr. Robertson's letter chiefly as an acknowledgment all around and to make the point that allowance must be made for local customs and for differences of opinion on the same facts. That Mr. Robertson writes his stories from first-hand knowledge of the West is certainly an established fact. He's spent his time living the West.

Chesterfield, Idaho.

Here's a discussion that you may like to read, or possibly to use in Camp-Fire. Comrade Frank Earnest climbs up on my withers and spurs from eye to heel about the stories "Denny" and "The Mad Commanders." There just about isn't a thing right in either one of them according to him, but he's a good scout and knows the West. But, in my estimation at least, he's absorbed some of its prejudices. At that, he is nowhere near as lop-sided in his views as a lot of these old-timers I have known, and his stuff makes good reading.

I take note of Mr. Sternberg's letter received last night and have written him to-day. Technically he is right—a horse has no "ankles." The corresponding joint is fetlocks, and hobbles on horses are worn on the pastern, which is between fetlock and hoof. But the average rancher speaks of ankles rather than fetlocks. The rather strange custom has grown up in many places to speak of ankles on the front legs and fetlocks on the hind ones. It isn't absurd either, since a horse has "knees" in his front legs, and "hocks" in his hind ones. I followed local custom in the matter, and I imagine that very few were in doubt what I meant. Still I should have been more explicit, and I have acknowledged the fault to Mr. Sternberg, and thanked him for the correction. Another thing that has encouraged the use of the word "ankle" is that the common use of the word "fetlock" is to describe the tuft of hair that hangs from that joint. It really seems absurd to say "that horse has sprained his fetlock." It may not be, but I have never happened to hear the remark made. I have, though, heard it said many times that "that horse has sprained his ankle."

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I wrote the "Mad Commanders" in the most pacific manner imaginable, but if Earnest's letter or mine should rouse the ire of other old range-war veterans I may get into the usual scrape of pacifists. I hope not.—FRANK C. ROBERTSON.

P. S.—Have held this for Earnest's final reply and am sending it along though there is little new except the correction of the age of Willie Nichols. I'm answering this, of course, but I think I've proved my case in my two other letters, so won't bother you with it.—F. C. R.

ON THE occasion of her first story in the magazine Viola Ransom Wood follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce herself.

South San Francisco, California.

I feel it a distinct honor to be asked to speak of myself before the Camp-Fire gathering, and wish that I had something more thrilling to own to in the way of occupations, past and present, than student, teacher, writer, housewife, and private secretary to a brigadier-general.

MY BIGGEST adventures thus far, however, have consisted of thirty-three years of living in the real West, and of seeking to make a way for myself in the story-telling world in which my father blazed a modest trail. Back beyond the days of the Louisiana Purchase, my people have been pioneers, and many an adventurous tale and hair-raising tradition have I heard as the elders of this line gathered at my grandfather's hearth.

Slavery days, "bushwhacking," backwoods life, Indians, "crossing the plains by ox-teams," "sailing around the Horn," "the days of gold, the days of '49." It was a wonderful—though ofttimes fearsome!—bringing up for a girl born with "imagination to create and the desire to wield a pen."

It took only the acquisition of a husband who has been for thirteen years chief electrician for the "biggest packing house west of the Rockies," and a veteran railroad engineer for a father-in-law to complete the groundwork of outside and business life on which to build my yarns.

AND, of course, I have a hobby. While I'd like to tell you it was collecting rattlesnake skins, raising alligators, or even the ubiquitous radio—to stick to truth, it's California history. And, being a native of New Mexico, I can acknowledge to this chronic affliction of "Californiac-itis" without being accused of hyper-super-excessive loyalty to my place of nativity.—VIOLA RANSOM WOOD.

CLARENCE JENKINS, of Braddock, Pennsylvania, who originated the idea of printing the Camp-Fire badge on every cover of our magazine, made another good suggestion that we're putting into force. Mr. Cox's name, as the one of us in direct charge of all matters pertaining to Camp-Fire Stations, now appears under "Standing Information" as well as with the list of Stations. A small matter, perhaps, but it's just such small matters as these that build up efficiency in practical service to reader.

IF I'M not mistaken, a second letter from Mr. Cleveland was quoted at Camp-Fire in reference to George W. Goethals for President. I find this first letter from Mr. Cleveland in our cache and feel he should have this chance to advocate his cause in full:

Asbury Park, New Jersey.

Although I do not own a revolver, nor expect to in the near future, I do most emphatically agree with the letter addressed to William Allen White in regard to his stand on the anti-revolver law, and your own editorial in the December 10th number of "Our Magazine."

NOW, we may not all need revolvers, but we need a man for President who is not only for freedom of speech, but freedom of thought and action within reasonable limits; and a consideration of those limits must depend on the ability to look, and practise of looking upon both sides of every question that affects the welfare of the citizen body and of the individuals composing it. If means are taken away of safeguarding the individual, the safety of the nation is weakened.

The stand of Mr. White in this matter seems to point to the need of a leader, who while a good theoretician, will balance theory with experience and so manifest that practical sense which alone constitutes the keystone quality we need in a public servant.

WHERE will we find such a man, a man who can *do* things; a man who *has* done things; a man who never fell down on a job, a man who did not fall down on a job that no one else could put over; a man who considers all sides of a question and goes ahead with decision, courage that swerves aside for no consideration—political or prejudicial—no consideration whatsoever, yet who puts the job before pride so that plans are changed at need though not at notion; who is steadfast without being stubborn, human and tactful without being weak, a 100% heart, a 100% head and a 100% right hand, where, I say, will we find such a man? I will suggest—George W. Goethals.

Read over that story, "The Spirit of the Canal Zone." Yes, I mean *you*. Read it over *twice*.

Goethals—the man who cut Culebra.

Geothals, the man who was offered practically on a platter the Mayoralty of New York City and who had the courage to refuse because they would not agree to his one condition: "That any policeman I see fit to discharge shall not get his job back through any political backdoors."

Yes, A. S. H., and other fellow citizens and brethren of the Camp-Fire, here's my slogan: George W. Goethals—Old Son of a Gun. He gets things started, and he gets things done!—CONVERSE CLEVELAND.

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VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

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Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

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When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

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Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

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To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognise each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, unstamped envelope.

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While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

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(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure"*)

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A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

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BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

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J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

36. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Santa Clara, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

37. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

38. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

39. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
GEORGE L. CATTON, 94 Metcalfe St., Woodstock, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

40. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

41. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
ED. L. CARSON, Monroe, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

42. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

43. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

44. Alaska
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1436 Hawthorne Terrace, Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, backpacking, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

45. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

46. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

47. Western U. S. Part 2 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 705 So. 1st St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

48. Western U. S. Part 3 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

49. Western U. S. Part 4 Idaho and Surrounding Country
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

50. Western U. S. Part 5 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with three cents in stamps—in Mr. Beadle's case twelve cents and in Mr. Moffat's, five cents—NOT attached)*

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51. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

52. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

53. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

54. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

55. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

56. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
HOWARD SHANNON, 631 East Fifth Street, Chattanooga, Tenn. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

57. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
HOWARD SHANNON, 631 East Fifth Street, Chattanooga, Tenn. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

58. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 424, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

59. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, 1,262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston Mass. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Tropical Forestry

DR. H. N. WHITFORD, School of Forestry, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

MAJOR W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., National Aeronautic Association, 26 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C. Airplanes: airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; Insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. COX, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions,** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash, D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska **Bureau, Chamber** of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion **Committee,** Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American **Union** for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

More about Clipper Ships' Record Passages

THE letter on the next page is but one of a number expanding on this subject in response to the appeal for further information which we printed with the original "Ask Adventure" Q. and A. Thank you, Mr. Pollock; and you too, you other comrades who so liberally gave tangible proof of your good will to the magazine and your fellow-readers:

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Weehawken, N. J.

MY DEAR MR. BROWN:—In *Adventure* for January 30th, 1923, you answer Captain Saxby's request for information about fast passages by clipper ships between New York and Frisco.

Now let me say that I personally never saw the light of the nineteenth century; but my father, who was in the U. S. Navy from 1878 to 1889, took a great interest in sailing records, and what I have to offer has been gleaned from one of his favorite books, Arthur H. Clark's "The Clipper-Ship Era."

I had intended to contradict you in regard to the *Comet's* passage in 1853, but I note that you give the time of her return run to New York. Clark gives no record of return passages, but the *Comet* took 112 days to Frisco in 1852-53, through the loss of much canvas and some of her "sticks" during a storm.

Captain Saxby asked for the time each way, and the *Flying Cloud* appears to have the west-bound record, 89 days in 1851 and again in 1854. The *Andrew Jackson* made the same time in 1860. The *Sword-Fish* did it in 90 days in 1852.

The *Comet* was 1,836 tons, Captain Gardner; the *Flying Cloud* 1,793, Captain Creesy; the *Sword-Fish* 1,036, Captain Babcock; and the *Andrew Jackson* 1,676, Captain Williams.

The *Flying Cloud* does not hold the record at 374 miles in 24 hours. The *Great Republic* under Captain Paul once logged 413 miles; but her size, 3,357 tons, was so much over any other ship, that the comparison in not entirely fair. The *Great Republic* holds the record from Sandy Hook to the equator, 16 days, although the *Stag-Hound*, Captain Richardson, ran from Boston Light to the equator in 13 days, a feat that has never been approximated.

Clark gives the time of the *Natchez* from Canton to New York as 78 days, and he claims the record for the *Sea-Witch*, 77 days in 1848, both records being made by Captain Waterman. Captain Saxby may find the answer to his question, "Fastest time from China to London by a U. S. ship" in the *Comet's* 84 days from Liverpool to Hongkong in 1854.

I have made a copy of this letter for Captain Saxby, so it will not be necessary for you to pass on to him what I have written above. I have taken the liberty of writing because of my father's great interest in this subject.

If you should decide to print any of this in the *Adventure* could you insert a brief notice that the writer's father, Fred. L. Pollock, who served on the *Constitution*, *Brooklyn*, *Essex* and *Wabash* between 1878 and 1889, died on December 4, 1922. It might come to the attention of some of his old shipmates who read *Adventure*?

I enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelop for any reply you may wish to make.—E. WALTER POLLOCK.

Olympia, Wash.

MY DEAR MR. POLLOCK:—I am much obliged for your letter, particularly as it called attention to a singular slip in typewriting made by me when I stated that the *Flying Cloud's* record time for a day's run was 374 miles. The best authority I have been able to find on the subject, while insisting that this was the best record made, places her day's run at 433½ miles in a day, which was the figure which I thought I had used in my article!

However, other authorities give the *Sovereign of the Seas* the record with a day's run of 347 miles. Still another one insists that the *Lightning*—which holds the record for the shortest time between England and Australia while on her maiden run from Boston to Liverpool to be delivered to the British company for which she was built—made the fast time on March 1, 1854, of 436 nautical miles during a heavy gale; and at times during the day the log showed she was making 18½ knots an hour. There are half a dozen ships credited with better day's runs than that you give for the *Great Republic*.

There is one thing, however, to be taken in consideration. There are no official records. All that we have on the subject is the newspaper stories of the day, private letters of ship's officers and others; and once in a while, some authority has had the rare good fortune to be able to see the original log of some of the famous clippers and there get the real dope.

This accounts for the many discrepancies which will be found if any one seriously seeks to run down the varying stories of great runs and fast times.

By the way, the *Natchez*, which I credited with the fastest run between Canton and New York, 76 days, was not a clipper at all but one of the old vessels built by the mile and sawed off in lengths to suit. She was a cotton drogher running to New Orleans for years. However, she was commanded by "Bully" Waterman, a fact which to any old seaman will account for her fast passage. The same Waterman, later in the *Water Witch*, is credited in some books with having bettered the time of the *Natchez* by one day. If any one could have done it he was the man. They were drivers in those days, and Waterman topped them all.

I note that your father entered the Navy just four years after I got out of it.—BERIAH BROWN.

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Big Game of Montana

HUNTING restricted in this section as well as pretty nearly everywhere else these days:

Question:—"Two companions and myself are planning a trip into the mountains, either in Montana or just across the line in Canada, for a few months' hunting.

We would greatly appreciate your advice on the following subjects:

What is the best place in that region for game?

What kinds of game would we find there?

What caliber rifle would you advise for big game?

What is the cost of a non-resident hunting-license, and when does the hunting-season open?

We are experienced in hunting and life in the open, but know nothing about that part of the country. We also have about everything needed on a trip of that kind except rifles.

Any general information about that country would be greatly appreciated."—WILLIAM MILLER, Missouri Valley, Ia.

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—Here goes for a little discussion of the game laws here and north of the line,

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which will be given in greater detail in the two pamphlets which I am sending you under separate cover. I am also sending a map of Montana so that you may be able to locate the counties mentioned.

The big-game country in that general part of the State which would be attractive to you, I should think, would be the territory lying west of the Glacier National Park northwest of Flathead Lake in Flathead and Lincoln Counties, Montana. In Alberta north of Glacier National Park and in British Columbia north of Lincoln and Flathead Counties, you will find good hunting; and for information concerning conditions in these two Provinces I would suggest that you write to the Secretary, Game Conservation Board, Vancouver, B. C., or the Minister of Agriculture, Edmonton, Alberta. If you are intending to hunt in either of these Canadian Provinces I would advise that you get complete copies of their game laws before starting.

Montana's open season for deer (male with visible horns) extends from November 1 to December 1. Elk may be killed in the open counties between October 15 and November 15. Sheep and goat, moose, antelope and buffalo are all protected by a closed season the year around at the present time in Montana.

The general non-resident hunting and fishing license costs $30. Alberta's non-resident general license costs $25. British Columbia receives $25 for a general hunting-license and $25 additional for each grizzly bear, moose, sheep, wapiti or caribou; $15 additional for each black or brown bear, mountain goat or mule deer, and $5 additional for every deer of any other species.

The limit is one deer and one elk a season. This is a good bear country, and the man who goes out to hunt Bruin has a good chance, subject to the game regulations, which are given in greater detail in these pamphlets. The big game one is likely to encounter in these districts includes elk, moose, bear, deer, mountain sheep and goats.

The matter of the rifle to be used must be left to your own judgment, but you should bear in mind that you are frequently called upon to shoot at long range, and a high-velocity, flat-trajectory weapon is called for. A .30-30 rifle is satisfactory for all-round hunting if you are lucky enough to get your close shots. The big-game hunters here like rifles that have the carrying power of the Winchester '03 and '06, or where automatic firearms are permitted, a gun like the .35 automatic Remington.

Let me suggest to any of your friends who may be interested that they write to the United States Department of Agriculture for Farmers' Bulletin No. 1288, which is a summary of the provisions of Federal, State and Provincial game laws for 1922.

Should you desire more detailed information covering any points please do not hesitate to write again, because when you get your questions pinned down to specific plans I may be of greater assistance to you.

Buying Land in Mexico

WATCH your step!

Question:—"Will you please advise me concerning lands on the isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico? This land is 14½ miles north of Salina Cruz, and the south line is 1½ miles north of the City of Tehuantepec. It is a colonization project. Would be pleased to know the attitude of the Mexican Government and especially of the natives in that section; climatic conditions and productivity of this particular section, and if possible, whether or not one can obtain good title and deed.

Several of us have bought, and are somewhat worried over reports of attitude of Mexican Government and that they will not give good titles.

The seller claims this land is an old Spanish land-grant and that the papers have the seal of the Mexican Government on them.

We buyers are all workingmen with families and would very much appreciate an early and authentic reply.

Am enclosing addressed envelop and stamp for reply."— —— ——, Casper, Wyo.

Answer, by Mr. Mahaffey:—According to the 1917 Constitution of Mexico all foreigners are prohibited from acquiring lands in a zone 32 miles wide on the coasts and 64 miles wide on both frontiers. The land you mention evidently lies within this 32-mile zone.

In order to acquire title to lands inside these zones as a foreigner it is necessary to make an agreement with the Mexican Government renouncing all rights you may have as an American or other foreigner to appeal for diplomatic aid in case any question comes up about the lands or other real estate. This document must be made in Mexico City by a person given your power of attorney or by yourself in person. It is commonly called a *patente*. All this must be done before a deed can be issued you.

Another way to avoid this law but which nevertheless leaves you in the same fix as far as your own Government protecting you is concerned is by forming a Mexican company called *Compañia en Nombre Colectiva* or a company in a collective name, which may be formed by two or more persons, none of whom needs to be a Mexican citizen. This scheme was originated in the State of Sinaloa, and there it holds water all right; but as Mexican courts judge cases by their own personal ideas and not by the law, it is hard to say whether this idea would hold in Oaxaca. In order to form this company it would be necessary for at least one of you to be in Mexico and have powers of attorney for the others, all legalized by the nearest Mexican consul. As a rule if you have the incorporation papers drafted and do not have to use a Mexican lawyer to draw them up for you, it will cost you about $50 for revenue stamps and other expenses.

Otherwise it is out of the question for this company to issue a title to you. Write and ask them about this point, and send me a copy of the letter, and also send me their address in the United States and in Mexico, and if it turns out that you have been stung the best way to do is to take up the matter with the United States postal officers.

Another point is that possibly they have led you to believe that you would have oil rights if oil was discovered in this land, but this is also a mistake, as any transfers after May 1st, 1917, do not carry any oil rights whatsoever; and if oil is found it may be filed on by others as according to the Mex. Constitution all such deposits belong to the nation.

Regarding the attitude of the natives toward Americans, the port of Salina Cruz, near these lands, has a very bad name for anti-American sentiment and this part of the country is filled with

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I. W. W.'S, bolsheviki and radicals of all kinds. I have been in Salina Cruz a number of times and always managed to have a run-in with the Mex. officials. One time I very nearly got in jail for "insulting" the police force of the place because I refused to be searched for arms unless by the captain of police as I told the police they only wanted to see if I had enough money to make it worth while for them to hold me up on my way back to the docks, which are about a mile from town. Several of my shipmates were held up that night, so I seem to have been right as the soldiers of the garrison held them up.

Regarding the lands in question, they may be all right and they may be all wrong. The one certain thing is that they are probably all grown up with jungle, and it will cost you from $10 to $15 gold an acre to clear them. Gosh, man, you should never buy land anywhere without seeing it! I can not tell you as to this exact tract, as to condition, and so on.

The climate is hot and tropical around Tehuantepec. No doubt the lands are fertile in the extreme when they are good, but when they are bad they are worthless. I can not say whether the lands you bought are any good or not. Why not write to the American consul at Salina Cruz and commission him to have some reliable person to go and see them and tell you what you have bought? Write him and ask him how much it will cost and then you will know what you have got hold of.

The products of this part of Oaxaca are sugar-cane, fruits, vegetables, beans, rice, corn and so forth. Tehuantepec has an altitude of 33 feet above sea level and has about 12,000 people. It is on the Tehuantepec River and is 13 miles from Salina Cruz. The dry season or Winter is from, say, November 1st to June 1st, and the wet or rainy season from June 1st to November 1st. Very good bananas are raised in this part of Mexico and labor is cheap but the men are worth just what you pay them—around 50 to 75 cents gold a day.

I have a copy of the incorporation papers necessary to form a company such as I mention and will send you a copy in case you ask for it. I would like to hear from you again right away and see how they put this proposition up to you, and at least try to see you get a half-way square deal.

The best time for you to go to these lands would be about November 1st, which would give you time to get land cleared ready to burn off at the beginning of the rainy season, to plant rainy-season crops of corn and so on. One good thing is that you have good transportation facilities and everything may be all right. I only hope so.

If you want an answer, read the rules.

Blue-Fox Farming in Alaska

HERE'S an interchange of letters between men who know:

Seward, Alaska.

EDITOR, *Adventure:*—In your February 10th issue in response to a query from a New York reader your Mr. Shaw, who is supposed to be authority on such matters, states, "A blue-fox farm was attempted several years ago on one of the northerly islands of southeastern Alaska, but it did not prove successful, as the animals do not thrive away from their natural habitat."

This is an error as blue-fox farming is one of the Territory's chief industries. Over three hundred islands are occupied by blue-fox farmers in a territory ranging one thousand miles from Portland Canal on the southeast to the Shumagins in southwestern Alaska, these islands averaging about eighty foxes to the island. Some of them have as high as five hundred on them and others as low as four pairs, the latter just starting in business. It takes about three years before the rancher is ready to market.

Pelts have been very high up to this year, averaging around two hundred dollars to two hundred and fifty dollars. The animals are fed on cereals cooked up in a huge kettle with fish, chiefly salmon. They are fed in pens daily and when ready for killing are trapped in these pens and the best animals sorted out. The killing is done in some cases by use of a wire loop, other ranchers using the thumb, which they press against the heart under the left fore-shoulder, stopping heart action.

Islands are rented from the Forestry Department and cost the fur farmer from twenty-five dollars to three hundred dollars yearly rental. A Territorial license is also paid and a tax of one dollar and fifty cents per pelt when marketed. Islands are stocked with from eight to twenty-four animals, the breeders selling at from two hundred and fifty dollars to three hundred dollars per pair after being weaned. This is the most lucrative part of the business.

The blue fox ranges from latitude 59 to 63, the arctic and red then superseding the blue. Many ranchers state that the blue fox is an offshoot of the arctic, the color changing through breeding and by climatic conditions. These blue foxes become very tame, playing with their owners like dogs.

Silvers and blacks do not do so well in this locality as they are harder to raise and do not breed so freely. Mr. Wagner, of the firm of Wagner & Liljegren of Prince William Sound, has one fox, named Daisy, which litters thirteen nearly every year.

Other ranchers of prominence in this section are C. L. Hoyt, Jack Steiner, Joseph Ibach, Clyde Coombs, Andy Grosvold, Ed Turek, and a hundred smaller ranchers. All have made money.

Besides the license one must have a substantial home, a good sea boat, and an island with timber sufficient for covert. To start successfully requires about five thousand dollars capital. The investment pays about twenty to forty per cent. The life is hard as the rancher must arise early, cook his feed, carry it to the feeding-pens, and when not otherwise engaged catch salmon for food. It is a very lonesome life unless one is married or has a partner. Mr. Clyde Coombs, who lives on Pearl Island, Portlock, has gone twenty-eight months without seeing a soul, weather conditions keeping him on his ranch. Severe storms sweep this locality, making it dangerous to venture out without a safe, stanch boat. The tides are very strong, with many rips and whirlpools.

The business, as I stated, is one of the big industries of the territory, and is carried on from Ketchikan to Unimak Pass. Many ranchers are turning to southeastern Alaska on account of more equable climate and less hardships. Hoping that this meets your favor and you will set the business right before your readers, I remain,

H. B. SELBY,
Editor and Proprietor,
Daily Gateway.

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Silverton, Colo.

H. B. SELBY, ESQ.:—Your very interesting letter of the 26th ultimo was passed on to me. Naturally I am glad to see a letter of this sort from a man on the ground who can give authentic and up-to-date information. I hope the magazine will find space for it soon, since it is of general interest to *Adventure* readers.

It is a mighty good thing for readers to pick up such points and send in corrections. We get them every little while from all over the world, proving that the friends of *Adventure* are real friends, who take enough interest in the magazine and the work it is doing to supply such corrections whenever they are qualified to do so.

From your letter I judge that you are so qualified, and not only am I keeping a copy on file, but I can assure you that it will appear in *Adventure* because of its general interest.

In regard to my own statement, the failure to which I referred did not occur in your territory, and it was in the early days of 1898. At that time I was in southeastern Alaska and quite conversant with that section and its conditions. However, my information *in re* the failure of that fox-farm, although I considered it authentic, may have been incomplete in that the failure might have been due to incompetence on the part of the "farmer" and not to the adaptability of Br'er Fox in acclimating himself.

As to the blue fox himself I know the breed well in their natural habitat (above the Circle) and I'll have to come back at you in a spirit of friendliness when you state that their range is from 59 N. to 63 N. They range north not only as far as land goes but even out upon the old "paleozoic" floes of the Arctic Ocean. Peary saw them half-way between Jessup Cape and the Pole and thought that an indication of land or islands near that point.

Also you say that "the arctic and red then supersede the blue." Now as a matter of fact there are *no* red foxes north of the Circle, and the blue fox is found wherever the arctic or white fox, is found. I am stating this from actual observance, and I saw many in latitude 80 N., in fact caught them and brought some back.

Again you say that many ranchers say the blue fox is an offshoot of the arctic fox, the color changing through breeding, etc. The fact is that the blue fox is a distinct species, and while there may possibly be cases of a cross between the white and blue I have never seen one, nor have I ever heard of one from either Eskimos or explorers who I know have been in their locality.

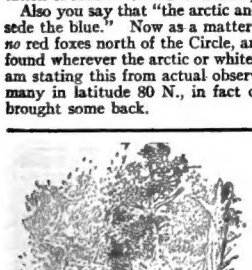
The blue fox ranges south as far as arctic conditions prevail (natural range, I mean) just as does that arctic bird, the ptarmigan. These birds are found *above* timberline, clear down into this State, though their natural habitat is from the Circle north. Latitude 59—on the west coast—would bring it around Mt. Fairweather, and I doubt strongly whether the blue fox can be found *in his natural state* as far south as that on the west coast. They *are* to be found in northern Labrador, where climatic conditions are similar to those farther north. As to the west coast, even around Prince William Sd. I'll be willing to bet that the blue fox had to be imported.

All of this, as I say, in the friendliest spirit, Mr. Selby, and to bring to your attention the fact that mistakes may be made even by those pretty well informed on a given subject. It all depends. In my own case I was ill-advised to make any statement depending on knowledge gained a score of years ago, and not brought up to date.

You may understand that it is hard to keep your information on specific points up to date unless you are in the territory or are there at frequent intervals, and even though you may have a very good basis of personal contact to work on. My own section covers the mining business—except general information on Baffinland and Greenland—and so the subject of fox-farming in Alaska can not be called strictly in my line. No doubt our expert, Mr. Solomons, could have given the same data as do you, had the letter in question been referred to him.

Thanking you for your interest in correct detail for the *Adventure* magazine,

Cordially yours,
VICTOR SHAW.



LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

MOORE, ROBERT (Bob). Last heard of in Crowder, Oklahoma, about nineteen years ago. Was son of widow, Mary Moore. Had brother Elick and one Tom. Also a sister, name not remembered. Tom died in Capitan, New Mexico, about nineteen years ago. Elick died about three months later in Crowder, Okla. Any information will be appreciated by his niece.—Address L. T. 455, care of *Adventure.*

ORVIN, W. Mother is very anxious to hear from you. We have moved to Sioux City, Ia. Please write.—Address DON. WILSON, 213 Main St., Sioux City, Ia.

KRETOSLAR, JERRY. Remember your old friends Dystnip, Doc Brady and Zofie Burdette? Have sold ranch where you visited me last, but mail will reach me there. Please write.—V. BURDETTE.

DREWES, HAROLD V. (Tex). Height five feet, ten inches, brown hair, brown eyes, age eighteen years. Missing from La Porte, Ind., since March, 1922. Last heard of in St. Louis, Mo. Believed to be somewhere in South America. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address JACK V. DREWES, 7XL Ranch, Box 858, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

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RUSSELL, ROBERT LAWRENCE. Please write to your mother, and let her know if you are alive and well.—Address MRS. LULU RUSSELL LAIRD, 209 E. Virginia Ave., Phœnix, Arizona.

WHITEPOOT, JACK. Resident of Peoria, Ill. Last heard of at Slave Lake, B. C., Canada. Please write to your old room mate.—Address CHALMERS MURRAY, Harrington West, Canada.

FOSTER, McCHACHERTY, Jubinville, and any one who knew me from Co. "C" 8th Infantry, A.E.F. Please write.—Address ADOLPH DOMONT, 76 Palmer St., Muskogee, Mich.

O'ROURKE, JOHN or Michael. (Brothers.) Any information will be appreciated by their brother.—Address JERRY O'ROURKE, Battery B. 3rd F.A. Fort Harrison, Ind.

MURPHY, ESMOND R. Served with Canadian Forces in France and American Forces in Siberia and Philippines. Age about twenty-three. Discharged in August, 1922. Last heard of at Scotia, Calif., in September, 1922. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JAMES B. MARCUM, Chavies, Ky.

BUCKLEY, JIM. Please write your friends Hazel and Andy.—Address ANDREW HOLEMAN, Hotel St. Mark, Oakland, Calif.

CLELAND, HERBERT. Age about nineteen. Last heard of near Edgewater, Colo., about three years ago. Any information will be appreciated.—Address M. M. BARTLOW, U.S.S. *New Mexico*, care of P. M., Box 15, San Francisco, Calif.

LYMAN, ROBERT. Formerly at Fort Sheridan Training School. Any information will be appreciated.—Address D. H. CARTER, Standard Domestic Appliance Co., 6548 Cottage Grove Ave., Chicago, Ill.

THE following have been inquired for in either the May 20th or June 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

ANDERSON, ABEL PONTUS; Benjamin, James; Brennan, Jack; Burnett, Thos.; Carver, Bernard R.; Cloud, Charles; Coleman, Anna Mae and Eva Verline; Corley, Charles; Damon, George B.; Davies, John Kirker; De Vaile, Louis; Drake, Elmer; Eberhardt, Sarah and Virginia; Economu, August; Fuller, W. J.; Furtado, Mary; Green, C. O.; Hamilton, G. A.; Hall, Hill and Valentine; Hoffman, William; Huff, Ray and Vera; Johnson, Bill; Johnson, O. W.; Kavash, Samuel; Koyoto, Whitey; Lindsay, Willard C.; Mackeys, or Mackie, Louis; Martin, Nate; McGovern, James and Joseph; McRobert, Charles; Miller, Charles; Miller, Mr.; Noll, Frank; Norton, Walter (Prof.); O'Dell, Ancil; O'Donnell, Michael C.; Ogg, John; Penland, Noble; Plint, Mary; Porter, Edward Beck; Puzar, Julius; Saxton, Samuel, Hugh, Joshua and Thomas; Schaffer, Gabriel Shannon, Naylor, Lettow, Davis, Lewis, Dunn, Pratt, Eames; Sharpe, Cecil; Vanderpool, Martha, Elizabeth, Nancy, Christie, Mary, Willis, Joe and Johnnie; Van Deusen, William and Mrs. Belle Van Deusen; Wammack, Ray; Wilcox, Arthur M.

MISCELLANEOUS:—Boster Brothers; Helen H.; Howard; Peter Joe.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

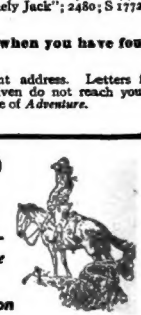
ADDLEMAN, FRANK C.; Aldridge, F. P.; Bailey, Dick; Baptiste, Jean; Balensifer, Frank A. W.; Barrett, Raymond; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Beverley, C. S.; Blaicher, Chas. A.; Bonner, Major J. S.; Boes, Mrs.; Brown, Mrs. W. E.; Bryson, Clarence F.; Buckley, Ray; Butterfield, M. E.; Bryon, J.; Bushby, Edward P.; Carr, John; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; Center, Jack; Chartrand, A.; "Chink"; Coles, Bobby; Corbett, Fred P.; Coleman, J. J.; Connor, A. M.; Cook, Elliott D.; Cook, Wm. N.; Corporal; Courtland, Victor; Dalton, Fred; Davis; De Brissac, Ricardo; Dennis, F. C.; Dunn, Ed.; Edwards, Edgar; Erwin, Phil; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Ford, Harry; Franklin, R.; Gale, Geo. A.; Garson, Ed.; Green, L. E.; Grimm, H. C.; Gunn, P. R.; Hailstrom, Chief; Hall, M. R.; Harriss, Walter J.; Haskins, S. S.; Hooker, Wm. F.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Iverson, Geo. L.; Jackson, R. R.; Kelly, C. H.; Kennedy, Paul I.; Kuckaby, Wm. Francis; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lange, Algot; Lansen, Paul Jones; Larisey, Jack; La Sonn, Mrs. Fred W.; Lee, Wm. R.; Lekki, Michael; Lovett, Harold S.; Lenihan, Robert P.; MacDonald, James; McAdams, W. B.; McGovern, J. V.; McKee, A. L.; McLane, A.; McNair, Henry S.; Mackintosh, D. T. A.; May, E. C.; Mendelson, Alick; Miller, Walter; Minor, John; Molitor, Joseph; Nelson, P. L.; Nichols, Chas. B.; Nylander, Towne J.; O'Hara, Jack; Overton, C. H.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phillips, F. R.; Pigeon, A. M.; Posner, Geo. A.; Pulis, H. F.; Raines, Wm. L.; Rich, Bob Wagoner; Raymond, C. E.; Rogan, Chas. B.; Rutherford, May (Mr.); Ryan, J.; St. Clair, Fred; Schafer, Geo.; Schmidt, Geo.; Sloan, Ch. A.; Simonds, Frank W.; Smith, C. O.; Starr, Ted; Stewart, E. J.; Stevens, Mrs. Albert A.; Stocking, C. B.; Stonway, James; Strong, Mr.; Swan, Geo. L.; Tripp, Ed.; Thaxter, Kenneth; Van Tyler, Chester; Varner, C. W.; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Warren, C. Chester; Watkins, E. V.; Watson, Elmo Scott; Williams, Grover.

MISCELLANEOUS:—WS-XV; R. E. H.; Shorty; 348; C. C. C.; H. V. S.; T. W. S.; "Lonely Jack"; 2480; S 177284; J. C. H.; 398; W. A. H.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given do not reach you.—Address L. PATRICK GREENE, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD
JULY 10TH ISSUE



Besides the **complete novel** and the **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

SPORTIN' BLOOD — ***Frank C. Robertson***
A tenderfoot says, "Put up or shut up."

AN EDGE TO A SWORD — ***Harold Lamb***
The weapon that was bewitched.

THE MAN-KILLER — ***Negley Farson***
"I kill a man before dis!" *Pavel* threatened. But this was another time.

THE MYTH-KILLERS A Four-Part Story Part II — ***Hugh Pendexter***
Damoan the Fox picks up the White Indian's trail.

PIZARRO'S RING — ***Paul Severance***
A bull-fight, a curse—and a gentleman of color.

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